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NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.



CHAPTER I.

“ A THING of beauty is a joy for ever.”
That is my text for this chapter, and my sermon is going to be an amplification and enlarging upon that idea. Keats meant it in a purely material sense, for his intense perception of the beautiful was confined to material objects ; but I, having adopted it for my motto, intend it to be taken in a nobler, wider, more spiritual sense. The subject I am going to write about is to my mind “a thing of beauty;” for what is more preëminently so than a tender, “loving, passionate, human soul, made more tender, more loving, by many a sore grief,” by many a gnawing sorrow, till towards the

hour of its setting, whether calm or whelmed to the last in storm-clouds, it shines with a chaste mellow radiance such as our earth lamps do not afford us here, borrowed (oh, priceless loan!) from the fountains of light above? Love in such a soul, growing purified from the drossy, worthless part of earthly passion which oftentimes forms the largest share of it, is raised higher and higher above this world's low level, above its dull swampy flats, till it merges in that better, boundless love which is the essence of the Deity, a love free from the sharp sting of disappointment, free from the mortal taint of satiety, and which decay is powerless to soil with its foul, polluting fingers.

Even taking it in its narrow material sense, I agree very fully and heartily with the sentiment of Keats' suggestive line, and thank him most humbly and sincerely for saying for me, so pithily and concisely, what I should never have been able to say

so well for myself. Yes ! I subscribe to the opinion of that born Greek, whom some anachronism isolated from his kin and his country, and set amongst uncongenial money-making Britons, full twenty centuries too late. I subscribe to it ; but yet I know, on the other hand, that we all learned, on no less authority than the copy-books, which exercised our powers of handwriting in the days of our hard-worked, highly educated youth, that “ beauty is a fading flower ;” and, applied particularly to woman’s loveliness, there is none more favourite among that bundle of dull platitudes, of insipid, trite commonplaces which enrol themselves under the head of moral maxims. Of course it is true—tiresomely, provokingly, heart-breakingly true ; so true as to be almost a self-evident proposition. Which of you, O daughters of Eve ! has not made this interesting discovery in natural history for yourself, by one or other of the following pleasant processes ? Either, standing after the

manner of your kind, considering your *tout ensemble*, in that teller of such gall-bitter, such treacle-sweet truths, your looking-glass, you make the discovery, some fine day, that you have lost your most effective, aggressive weapon against mankind. Your little sword is dented; your pretty arrows have lost their points; your power is gone from you. Disarmed you stand there; like "brave Kempenfelt," your "victories are o'er," and very ruefully you have to own to yourself that your soft, much prized fascinations, which, perchance, made your small world so cheery a place, have gone away from you, never to come back again any more. "Eheu fugaces!" They have slipped away, treacherous ones, out of your reluctant clasp, "most cunningly did steal away," as is the wont of the brief good things of this troublesome world of ours, leaving us very heart bare, and sore, and grumbling; none the worse, perhaps, for that at last. Or else you have this truth

exemplified in a manner some degrees less painful to your own feelings ; seeing old Time, that busy artificer, performing on the countenance of an intimate friend. Curiously you watch him, as, with his graver's tool, he draws horizontal, parallel lines along the smooth brow ; designs skillfully a simple yet ingenious pattern of crow's feet at the corner of each haggard eye, pares down the rounded contours, and cuts them into sharp points and angles, and paints out with his dull grays and drabs the rosy flush of colour from the once love-bright cheek. Ay, me ! Ay, me ! indeed. What so frail, so butterfly lived as beauty in the individual ? Hardly are we consoled by the reflection that at least in the species it seems perennial. But though the visible presence of this fairest of earth's visitants—this living witness that Eden once existed—is so sadly short, yet in memory it outlives all the other powers that sway our destinies. Great kingdoms grew into being

in the old times, at least we suppose so, we having now nothing of them but their dark old tombs. Big men did big things, and might as well never have done them for all we know about them, seeing that they rot now in such unrescued, irrecoverable oblivion. Even the most learned of our pundits in the historical and antiquarian line have but the most shadowy impression of what brave deeds were done, of what wise thoughts were thought, of how men lived and loved, and believed and hoped in that dim far dawning. As for the bulk of us ignoramuses or *ignorami* (as I suppose would be the correct plural), it is a great chance if we know the names of the four great empires that people talk so much about nowadays.

But when shall we cease to hear the trailing garments of Helen the well-robed, the goddess of women, sweeping down the shadowy echoing corridors of Priam's cool, wide palace? And when, oh when, save

at the hour when recollection's self perishes, shall we forget "the serpent of old Nile;" made up of delicious contradictions, enchanting termagant! the tempest of whose anger blew sweeter than the breath of the west wind come straight from a garden of roses; whose scolding angry words seemed more caressing, more utterly bewitching than other women's love-whispers! Frail, vain, variable, heartless coquette! who could yet love so exceeding well "her curled Antony," her mailed Roman darling, as to choose the aspick's cold kisses on her soft flesh, rather than existence without him—who could lay aside life, with so queenly rare a grace, as to make us "half in love with ~~dreamful~~ death!" still, yes still, though dead, you snare us "in your strong toil of grace." That was a lovely conception of the mightiest and sweetest of all singers that have sung for many a day, embodied in the "Dream of Fair Women." Those "far renowned brides

of ancient song" were worthy denizens for the fragrant chambers of a great poet's soul. He who has been able to set before us—

"Idalian Aphrodite, beautiful,
Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells,"

who has called her back from her old Cyprian home, with her own rosy cloud of love and maddening witchery round her, taking the senses by storm, who can, even now, make men's veins throb and their pulses beat with ecstasy, leading them into the presence of her divine ambrosial loveliness, he, I say, is one of the few great artists—the one great artist indeed, in these barren days, that is equal to the task of limning those "imperial moulded forms" that haunt his dim wood. How great a treat, how rich a banquet for the half-starved fancy to wander with the great enchanter among the shadowy aisles, the faintly-seen archets of those great dew-drenched ancient trees, to see him conquer

the unconquerable one, foil the prime victor over human kind, touching the dry dust, and making it re-assume the forms of those "Daughters of the Gods," making us reach across the centuries, and awaking them out of their nameless graves, with the sleep of many ages still heavy on their long-closed eyelids, making us behold them, shining in the noonday rays of his strong imagination, more perfectly, flawlessly fair, more absolutely free from mortal stain or blemish, than when first they ravished the eyes of their demigod lovers! I could babble on, on this theme, for ever: it opens out such long lines of thought. I am not Tennyson, as I need hardly inform anyone who has got thus far. I am also pretty sure that I am not possessed of that greatest of gifts, a poetic soul,—in its creative power coming next (though at an immeasurable distance) to God Himself. But, for all that, I too have, this night, had a "Dream of Fair Women." My fair

women were not celebrated ones, though. The world never heard, never will hear of them. Indeed, there is nothing for it to hear. Their voices were too low and gentle to be audible above its dull roar. But none the less for that are they pleasant visitants. Nor are they only dream-faces bending over me, in their evanescent intangible bloom, as I lie on my bed, and, when morning dawns, leaving only a vague unreal impression of something far pleasanter than the work-a-day world of realities affords. No, they are real flesh-and-blood faces ; the faces of the women who, at different times, in different relations of life, have influenced and moulded my destiny. Rather should I say that, in an inner chamber of my spirit, I have a secret picture-gallery. None enters there but myself ; small beauty would a stranger see, perchance, in some of those woman portraits. Some of my pictures were painted many years ago ; some have been slightly, poorly

sketched, and their colours are getting *wishy washy* and blurred. Others glow with more vivid, liquid, melting hues, every time I look upon them. But the gem of the collection has been hung there but a short time. The paint is hardly dry yet. Often I stand before that girl image, and gaze and gaze till my eyes ache and burn, in the intensity of my longing that those lips should unclothe but *once* again, for one little minute; should just say *one* word, whether cross or kind, or cruel or tender, would make but small difference, so as it were conveyed by that obstinately silent voice. But they never do. They never will again, though I should gaze till my eyes shrank up in their sockets—till their light were quenched for aye. O dead woman! you have caught his speechlessness from your grim bridegroom, Death. My case is not an uncommon one, I think, if that could console me. She was everything to me, and I was less than nothing to

her ; and now she is dead, and I *must* talk about her to some one. I will tell the simple story of her short life. I do not want her to be forgotten, though now there has been for twelve months past a small white tablet, with a marble lily drooping broken upon it, among the knightly brasses, the cold "Hic jacets" of the gray old church where so many Chesters are sleeping. But let no one be afraid that I shall make an elegy of this life. Let no one dread a long threnody, breathing despair, with tears in every line. I do not despair. I know so *surely*, I am so utterly persuaded, that it is *well*.

CHAPTER II.

O, THE sea, the sea ! the unpalling, the opal-coloured, the divine ! What a thing a sea-place is in the summer weather ! What does it matter if it is the most frightful collection of unsightly houses that ever disgraced a low coast—if dreary flats, than which nor pancakes nor flounders could be flatter, stretch away behind it, flank it on either side ; if not the most abortive attempt at a tree is to be had, for love or money, within a circle of ten miles round it ? What matter if it is crammed to overflowing with shopkeepers garmented in the brightest of their own wares (no great drawback to my mind), for why should not the poor souls disport themselves as well as we, though *we* are vessels

made of the finest porcelain clay, while they are nothing but common red delft? But anyhow, have not we got the dear, dear sea, and what can we want beside? What more do our eyes desire to light on, except perhaps the unfailing row of white bathing-machines, standing unsteadily on rickety red wheels in various stages of paralysis, waiting to jolt down with us into the cool waters that look so caressing in their greenness? I appeal to everybody—which of our short joys since can, for a moment, be compared to the utter bliss, in one's child-days, of that arrival towards the end of some long June day, together with one's brethren, at one's poky sea-side lodgings, where the six weeks of midsummer holidays went by like a morning dream? In spirit I see myself again, my small body clothed in a paletot of railway dust, my nurses groaning under a forest of wooden spades, laden with dozens of holland frocks warranted to resist the combined action of

sand and salt water. How much, how deceptively sweeter the bread and butter tasted than in the despised nursery at home? What delicacy at any aldermanic banquet since has equalled the flavour of those goggle-eyed shrimps? And then to go to bed with a smell of sea-weed in one's button-nose, and the boom of the sea in one's sleepy ears, and have beatific visions of such cockle-shells as the real world does not dream of.

Of the few people who know Pen Dyllas, most have an ill word for that small, dull, North-Wales watering-place. Innocent of band is it. Neither parade nor pier can it show, and its one pleasure-boat is generally looked upon with a suspicious eye as being liable to the imputation of unseaworthiness. It seems to me to be like a modest young person, totally eclipsed, annihilated by its exceedingly full-blown elder sister, ugly Ryvel—all lodging-houses and dust and glare. Poor little

place ! It is only a child of two years old, and not a well-grown, well-thriven child either. A few clumsy strokes will make a very sufficient drawing of it. Two rows of narrow slight houses gaze at each other placidly across a street, which has only lately been metamorphosed into a street from a little-travelled country road. There the portraits of groups of hatted Welshwomen on the letter-paper in the window of the librarian, stationer, and toy-merchant, stare calmly all day long at the one drab crinoline swinging sportively in the breeze outside the door of the mercer, grocer, and ironmonger opposite. Walk on but a few steps further and you come to that set of first-class residences (as the advertising placard thinks them) which rejoice in the martial name of Inkerman-terrace. Pin for pin alike are those bow-windowed houses ; lucky are they in that they have no *vis-à-vis* across the road to overlook them. If they were not so entirely shadeless they

would be perfect, at least so say the widowed ladies who own them. There Breadalbane House and its titled neighbours look with dignified repose into a green field, where feeble cricket tries to get itself played, sometimes by two efficient elevens of one long young man and three small boys. Then comes the railway, where luggage-trains drag their weary length, and where expresses flash by at night like some dark fabulous beast, with vague shape and far-seen glowing eyes, rushing roughly into the sleeper's dreams. And last, come the wind-blown broad sand-flats, where the tide goes out so absurdly far as to give one the idea of hiding itself somewhere round the corner out of sight.

Grand days, as to weather, come to despised Pen Dyllas as well as to finer places, and one had come on the 16th of June 186—. The sun blazed away in his rare glory,—rare in these rainy isles,—and

held out unconcealed threats of sunstroke to any who ventured too impudently into his kingly presence. But in his very fierceness there was benevolence, and nobody was afraid of him. Every ray of light which turned the shabby lodging-house carpets into cloth of gold, every mignonette-sweetened little breeze which stirred the scanty lodging-house curtains, said as plain as could be, "Come out, come out, and be happy." The birds said the same; at least they turned it into an anthem, and sang it with a full choir. But it certainly was meltingly hot. The woody hills behind quiet Aber Fynach town were so drowsy that now, at mid-day, they were sleeping soundly, hazy, purple-hollowed, and the road trailed itself along like a dusty white snake.

The same course of reasoning brought everybody to the same conclusion. "It is too bakingly hot for a long walk. Let us go to the shore." And so on the shore,

towards half past twelve o'clock, you might have seen all the *élite* of Pen Dyllas drinking in the faint ocean wind, thirstily, thriftily, as if afraid of wasting any, and saying in their hearts that God was good. There young men threw stones by thousands and never hit anything; did not intend to, they would have averred, if you had asked them. There muslin-clad damsels paddled daintily with their fingers in little sea-pools and miniature lagoons, and fished out infinitesimal bits of seaweed, and small green crabs, actively unwilling, or filled little fancy baskets with ugly, worthless, dingy stone, changed in the crucible of the imagination into agates, and onyxes, and amethysts. There old people tottered, and basked, and the great sun-god warmed even their froggy old blood for a bit. And they looked out rheumy-eyed, over the sea, and pondered, perhaps, on its everlastingness—in its perpetual change, defying change—in contrast to their own short

tether. Pondered much, more probably, on their gout, and their port wine, and their knitting, and their grandchildren. And those grandchildren dug, and squabbled, and got coated with dirt, and bored their adoring relatives, after the manner of such small deer.

One group did not precisely come under any of these heads, but, I think, it was enjoying itself as much as any. It was a very small group, consisting of only two persons. Lovers, of course? Well, no. Not exactly. The first person was a white Pomeranian dog, with the face of a fox, with an excitable temperament, a great deal of fluffy hair, and a tail rather resembling a prolonged rabbit's scut. This said hound was smelling, with scientific enjoyment, at a delicious heap, composed of sea-tangle, rotten wood, and dead starfish. The other person was a young woman, sitting very comfortably on the shingle, all alone. She was not in any peculiarly graceful attitude;

in fact, ease seemed to have been more in her thoughts than elegance, when she chose her position. Her hat was pulled down *à la* highwayman, very low over her eyes, to balk the sun's inquisitiveness (it rather whetted other people's curiosity, by the by, which she might or might not have been aware of, I would not say which); and her hands were holding each other tight round her knees. N.B. Being innocent of gloves, they were in process of being dyed a good rich oak colour.

Not a beauty, this young woman. She would cut but a sorry figure amongst a set of straight-featured, lily and rose fair ones. A face that there would be about a thousand different opinions of, and perhaps not one altogether commendatory or approbative. Yet, for some reason or other, Kate Chester was a girl that men were apt to look twice at: not seldom three or even four times; whom some looked at once too often for their peace of mind. Now for an

inventory of her few charms ; which, somehow, did the work of other people's many. Olivia's description of herself in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*,—"Two gray eyes, item, two lips indifferent red," &c., will not serve here. A great deal, though no miraculous quantity, of bright hair ; bright, without a speck of gold near it. Neither wholly red nor wholly brown, were those well-plaited locks. Brown was, of the two, their predominant hue, with just a dash of red to keep them warm and a-glow. They could have been easily matched out of the dead leafy treasures that autumn scatters in a dank wood. Very, very low down, faultily low, some good judges said, they grew on a fairly white brow, and thence went off, crisply, fuzzily, in a most unaffected wave. Big green eyes, rather deeply put in ; not peculiarly luminous or eloquent, on ordinary occasions ; rather soft, not very ; but which when the torch of passion should light up their green depths, would (you

felt sure) have power to look through and through you ; would follow you about, perhaps, as the eyes of some well-limned pictures do. A small turn-up nose, much animadverted on by contemporary girls (what a handle that inquisitive little feature did give to Kate's adversaries!). Well, it did defy all rules, certainly, but then it never got red. Cheeks pale, not very apt at blushing prettily ; mouth came under the head of the wide, full-lipped, smiling, but with a good deal of lurking gravity, and an immensity of latent, undeveloped passion in some of the curves it fell into. Laughing innocent lips that seemed to expect life to be one long pleasant jest. Such as this face was, it was nicely set on a warm, round throat, like a pillar (only that a pillar is cold), as unlike a swan's as one thing could be unlike another.

Now for Kate's figure. I do not think it was exactly of the cut of the *Venus de Medici*, but, for all that, it always seemed

to me rather ensnaring to the fancy, in its partridge-like plumpness, soft undulating contours, and pretty roundnesses ; so removed from scragginess, and free from angles. Many *women* affirmed that it was too full, too developed for a girl of twenty. The Misses M'Scrag, whose admirers might have sat with comfort in the shade cast by their collar-bones, were particularly stiff on this point ; but no *man* was ever yet heard to give in his adhesion to this feminine fiat. Anyhow the light did seem to fall lovingly, as in the case of the "Gardener's Daughter," on "the bounteous wave of such a breast as never pencil drew," and on the waist—no marvel of waspish tenuity, but naturally healthily firm and shapely. Her common little blue and white cotton gown draped the pretty shoulders and bust, and expressed them as well as a grander garment would have done. She and it were on good terms, did each other good service, and became one another very satis-

factorily. There she sat, lazy, happy, passive ; a pretty patch of blue on the gray stones.

Lamb says that he has tried reading out of doors in a sunny garden, and has found it only a pretence, a thing impossible of accomplishment ; and such seemed to have been Kate's case, for her book was tossed down by her side, and an inquisitive little gust was turning over the leaves, as if it too was interested in the story, and wanted to see what the end was. But it was only appearances that were against Kate. She had read every word of it without skipping ; had come to "Finis" about five minutes ago, and had very barely escaped the degradation of crying over the last page. Her book was one that, I think, few people were willing to put down when once they had taken hold of it. It grasped the attention, and held it prisoned in a sweet detention, and its name was Whyte Melville's *Interpreter*. Kate had just been

reading with rather a lump in her throat, how, when the sacristan opened the door of the De Rohans' vault, the gentle breeze went in with him, into that grim charnel-house, and "stirred the heavy silver fringe on the pall of Victor's coffin." Those few words had a sort of fascination for Kate. Her brain was passively recipient of the idea they conveyed, and her deep eyes looked out over the water, full of a girl's speculations.

"Poor Victor! poor Victor!" she thought; and then she tried mentally to project herself into the situation of the wretched, remorseful Frenchwoman, the coquette whose penitence came too late; the frail wife, whose heart was lying by the cold heart of the gallant young Hungarian noble. "I would not have treated him so; at least I do not think so, and yet who knows what I might do, if I were a great beauty and a princess like her? Some say that virtue is only absence of temptation. Bah! That

is a hateful, godless maxim, worthy of Rochefoucauld. I suppose that he got his idea of woman's character from studying Madame de Longueville's excellences. But I wonder, now, is love such an irresistible power, such an all-conquering influence (the greatest of human influences), as they make out in books like this, or is it an odd sort of pleasant dangerous drunkenness that one is well rid of? Well, it is evident that I do not know much about it practically, or I could not analyse it so coolly. Could I, Tip? Now, where is that misguided dog gone? Tip, Tip, Tip!" And she broke off the thread of her reflections short, to throw a very small stone, weakly, at Tip, who appeared to be coming to a decided difference of opinion with another *dog errant*, whose taste for dead starfish, &c., clashed with his own. "I cannot but think that there are plenty of other enjoyments that would fill one's life quite as well, and sufficiently, and a good deal more peace-

ably, without any of those dreadful hot and cold fits that one is subject to in typhus fever and love. Why, there are so many things in this world that are positively delicious, that have no more to say to love than I have to that Bluecoat boy over there. The very fact of being alive and well and breathing this sea-breeze ought to satisfy any rational creature. Look at me now. I have done very well without love, at least love in that technical sense, without this fine passion, for twenty years, and I do not see why I should not do it for twenty years more. That is rather a pretty girl, and the man is not unlike a gentleman. They were the people that sat before us in church last Sunday. They are bride and bridegroom, I'm sure; for they had only one prayer-book between them, and it had an ivory back. What absurdly false pictures novels do give one of love, the drawings they make of it are so out of perspective! They represent it

as the one main interest of life, instead of being, as it mostly is, a short unimportant little episode. I declare it is enough to give one a disgust for the whole concern. I do believe it is one great imposture, one of those old well-established lies that the world will go on believing. Ah, yes; mine is the right view. What a pity that I cannot get anybody to agree with me! *Juste ciel!* what an exhibition of Magenta stockings!

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gi'e us,
To see oursels as others see us!"

Well, if it did, there would be a great many more suicides in the world than there are at present. Yes, I am wiser than the rest of the world. Wiser than Dante and Shakespeare, and Tennyson perhaps? Ah, by the by, that is the rub! Do Juliet, and Imogene, and Francesca of Rimini, and Fatima talk nonsense? If they do, I would rather have their nonsense than any other people's sense. Yes, yes, after all I do believe they

are pretty nearly right. Love must be the one great bliss of this world, though I know nothing about it. I wonder what it feels like? Perhaps that great bliss will never come to me; most likely not. I never yet saw the man who could arouse it. Did not I, though? I am not so sure of that. I may as well keep to truth, now I am alone. I wonder was Victor anything like Colonel Stamer? Oh, no—not a bit. Victor was light, and about six times as good-looking. Dear me, how silly! And how disgracefully hungry the sea makes one. Why, it is one o'clock, and shall not I get a homily from old Piggy for being late?"

Up she jumped on this reflection and took off herself, her cotton gown, and her Pomeranian dog, at a pretty quick rate, with her thoughts divided between love in the abstract and luncheon in the concrete, and followed at her departing by the admiring eyes, the utterly-approving gaze, of

a retired grocer and a brace of attorney's clerks.

Poor little Kate! she looked cheery and light-hearted enough now, one would say; and yet, but two years ago, she had vehemently protested, and firmly believed, that she never, *never* could feel happy again in this world; it was nonsense to suppose that she could. That was in one of those brain-rending moments which one wonders afterwards, curiously, how one could live through,—which one never could live through and be sane if a blessed numbness were not sent us to wrap our senses in,—when she had pressed her warm quivering lips, half shrinking from the clayey contact, but resolute in despairing, detaining affection, on her mother's dead brow, whose cold would but feebly be compared to polar ice or statued marble. She had taken it as an insult, and spoken out angrily in answer, when some pitying friend had hinted to her that part-agonising

part-soothing truth, that time would dull her anguish, would bring her comfort. "Comfort!" she said, scornfully; "comfort must be the result of forgetfulness," and she did not want to forget. She would rather be miserable for ever than that. And then, too, she had prayed more ardently than she had ever supplicated any boon before that she might die also. Selfish, cruel mortal! She would have dragged that lost one back out of those welcoming skyey gates if she had had the power. But God was more merciful. He took the poor patient mother, very suffering, very world-weary, to Himself, and gave her rest, and left the little daughter to toil and moil and weep for yet a little space—*but* a little one, before His messenger came to fetch her too. And the sun shone, and the birds sang, and the mignonette on Mrs. Chester's grave sent up a sweet message from earth to heaven, from the resting-place of the dead woman's tired body to the resting-place of

the living woman's satisfied soul ; and before the crape on her dress had grown shabby, Kate had begun to laugh again very heartily, had begun to care whether her black gown fitted well or not, and would have shuddered and trembled sorely if she had seen near her the mower with his scythe whom she had invoked in the madness of her grief.

CHAPTER III.

EVERYBODY at Pen Dyllas dined at one. That was one of the manners and customs of the place. Such an idea as a late dinner had never entered their primitive heads. Everybody was dining now, and what was more, almost everybody was dining on mutton; for does not the sheep seem to be, *par excellence*, the beast of Wales? In almost every house down Inkerman-terrace some self-sacrificing mother was *sawing* away at a neck, or a saddle, or a leg, trying to make it go satisfactorily the round of the ten children, and feasting on the cat's bit herself. In Breadalbane House there was mutton too, and to judge by the smell, it seemed to have been walking up and down the stairs all the morning, and paying a good long

visit to each of the bedrooms in turn. Whatever it had been doing with itself all morning, however, there is no doubt that at the particular moment I allude to, it had just been set down on the parlour-table by a damsel, preëminent among women for the dirtiness of her fingers, the dilapidation of her wardrobe, and the exceeding Welshness of her tongue. Very slovenly and unappetising did the banquet look, after the manner of lodging-houses, and the family were gathering round the table languidly, ungreedily, for really the weather was too broiling for any viands less ethereal than ambrosia and claret-cup, and the flies were a great deal hungrier, and ate a great deal more than the Christians. There were places and nasty dull pewter forks for five, but only four were at present in possession. At the bottom of this social board, with his back to the cut-paper-adorned fireplace, anatomising the late so-active Welsh leg, sat the Reverend Josiah Piggott, black-

coated, clerical, flabby-faced. He was not a handsome man, certainly. I have seldom seen one less so ; but two or three very handsome men might have been made out of him, for there was fleshy material enough in the vast acreage of his mild pendulous cheeks, in the bone-work of his portentous hooked nose, for several very good-looking countenances, if they could but be made up differently. Those who believed in the uncomfortable Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of souls were much impressed with the idea that the spirit of the Reverend Piggott had but recently evacuated the body of a well-fattened south-down. Even those who were sceptical as to this notion could not fail to remark that in the sound of Mr. P.'s speech there was an undeniable kinship to a *baa*. Opposite to him, employed in the distribution of the fly-haunted salad, sat Mrs. Josiah Piggott, the partner of his joys, who, report said, had once been a fair enough woman to look

upon. She was rather haggard and mahogany-coloured now, and in a chronic state of weariness from the requirements of her exacting old incubus, who had put himself on the sick-list exactly twenty years ago, and resolutely refused to get off it again. And yet, even though his best friends could not deny that he was unto them a very grievous bore, let it be clearly understood that he was in the main as worthy and benevolent and harmless an old south-down as ever waddled along in fleecy unwieldiness. Now for the sides of the table. On one side, then, ruling over the potatoes, sat Margaret Chester, Kate's elder by three or four years. An elegant-looking young woman, people called her,—a vague term of approbation, I always think,—very fragile, and more ladylike than three-fourths of the well-bred women one might see in a county ball-room, with a figure whose exaggerated slenderness, and the tenuity of the 17-inch wasp-waist, was

These tradespeople are so dishonest. Which day was it that I walked all the way down to the market? Don't you remember, my love? It was that day that I was so terribly giddy going up to bed."

Whether it was the leg of his choice or another, Mrs. Piggott signified her intention of partaking of it. The other two did the same; so that for some little time his slow plump hands had to continue their cannibal occupation of dissecting a brother's limb.

"My love," he began again, when his duties were ended, "do you think I could eat a little bit of mutton? I am afraid I am not very hungry; my head is not very well." And he patted the sandy-brown hair that scantily covered his eminently respectable pate compassionately. "I have been a good deal worried all morning, writing business-letters; and I wanted you very much, dear ma, to consult you about Mrs. Barton's business. I called for you all over

the house, but I could not find you anywhere. It tired me a good deal; but of course that did not matter much," he said with flabby plaintiveness.

"Indeed, love, I'm very sorry," said Mrs. Piggott, penitent yet cheery; "but I assure you I was only away ten minutes on the shore, with Maggie, looking for onyxes; that was all, indeed, pappy."

"It was not ten minutes," said Maggie indignantly; "it was only eight and a half, for I looked at the clock as we came in; and we ran all the way from the post-office. Have you been to bathe to-day, Blount?" she continued rapidly, with great presence of mind, bent on stemming the current of Mr. Piggott's laments, across the table to her brother, who was grinning covertly at his revered relative.

"I should think so," said he expressively. "My good girl, you really should reflect before you ask such silly questions. What other way of improving the shining

hours in this gay Babylon is there except dabbling them away in the water? Why, I swam right round in front of the ladies' bathing-place. I thought you'd be sure to see me; and I kicked up my heels, and made a tremendous splashing in hopes you'd think I was drowning."

"Promising amiable youth!" Maggie said, with an affectionate smile (I'm sure I don't know why, or for what remarkable virtues his sisters adored that young scamp so); "but you might have saved yourself the trouble, for really I was so hot and cross that I don't think I should have cared much if you had been."

"Should you not? Well, that's the sensiblest speech I've heard you make for many a day. I say, what a set of idiots they are about here! They cannot swim a stroke, one of them. What's become of Kitty, the flower of Dunblane? By the bye, now I come to think of it, her name was not Kitty; it was Jessie."

"I don't know," said Miss Chester indifferently. (They were not a family that made much fuss about one another; never called one another "dear," and only kissed, as a great ceremony, when setting off or on returning from a journey.) "She went out after breakfast with a book, and Tip went with her; so I don't suppose she can have come to any harm."

"Perhaps she has eloped with that red-headed youth that she admired so much yesterday—I always tell that girl that her levity will bring her to some fearful end—or perhaps the tide has washed her away," said Blount, without emotion at the idea of either catastrophe. "Well, if she prefers the sad sea waves to her dinner, it's her business, not mine, however much I may deplore her infatuation."

A few more bleats, a few more words, a few more mouthfuls of mutton, and then a running upstairs was heard, and a young person in a blue-cotton gown came quickly

in, rather hot, rather flushed, and a little bit cross in consequence.

"My love," was Mr. Piggott's meekly hortatory greeting, "I wish you could manage to be in in proper time of a day; you know, love, how much I like punctuality and order, and that I don't allow any irregularity in my house. Do you hear, my love? Don't let it occur again."

"Early dinner is an institution that ought to have been abolished at the Christian era," replied his dutiful niece, throwing off her hat, and sinking exhausted into her chair.

"Hear, hear!" said Blount, rubbing his hands approvingly.

"It's a remnant of paganism," continued Kate, half-laughing, but cross still; "a disgrace to a civilised country. I wish someone would set up a Society for the Suppression of Early Dinners; I would be chairman or secretary with all the pleasure imaginable."

"I'd be bottle-holder," cried Blount with excitement. "By the bye, that's a mixture of metaphors."

Poor Mr. Piggott collapsed, silenced by the anathemas obliquely launched at him. Well he knew that it was for his "stomach's sake, and his often infirmities," like St. Timothy's of old, that the daily banquet is so prematurely spread. Never from his partner's meek lips did he hear such rough language.

And then, having discharged the little darts of her ill-humour, Kate relapsed into amiability; tried fruitlessly with warm white fingers to pat into tidiness and smoothness the hopelessly erratic locks of her dead-leaf hair, and telegraphed across the table to the sympathetic and responsive Blount a *moue* intended to be very ugly, and witheringly derisive of her unconscious adversary.

And then the father of the flock lifted up his voice, and baaed as follows:

"My dear loves, is not this the day

that our kind friends, Sir Guy and Lady Stamer, invited us to dine with them? I hope, dear mamsey, that you kept the note, that there may be no mistake?"

"Yes, love," responded the female Pig-gott, "it is the day. By the bye, girls, which of you two is coming with us?"

"Maggie," said Kate.

"Kate," said Maggie. Both very promptly.

"Of course you will go," said Maggie.

She was looked upon by her friends and the public in general, as a passing, lively, light-hearted individual; for after all, what do one's friends or the public know either about one? But in private she was much given to fits of despondency when reflecting on Kate's dealings with her; and, indeed, heretofore she had not been very lucky.

"Of course you will go; you are one of those people whom fortune always favours. You always get everything you want."

"Get everything I want!" said Kate, in a high key of surprise and indignation. "I

don't know what you mean. Why, if I got everything I wanted, do you suppose I should be sitting here now, eating cold mutton, and have this horrid old blue garment on? Not exactly."

"Well, there are degrees of unluckiness," said Maggie in a despondent tone: "you may not be particularly fortunate in the abstract, but, compared to me, you are a prodigy of good luck."

"I'll tell you what you shall do, my children," suggested Blount, with a parental air; "you shall draw lots, and I'll hold them for you. I'll hold them quite fair, without fear or favour; I promise I will. You know, so exactly are my affections balanced, that I don't care a straw which of you comes; and, in fact, it won't kill me if neither of you do."

"No, no," cried Kate, clasping her little dimpled hands quite tragically on his shoulder, "indeed you sha'n't; I always draw the shortest lot, and I'm sure you'd cheat me."

“My good Kitty,” he said, “cast one more slur upon my probity, and I shall be compelled to box your ears. Well, if you persist in distrusting the best of brothers, let uncle Piggott hold them ; you cannot suspect him.”

But Kate would not consent. She longed with such surprising intensity — surprising even to herself—for this trifling pleasure, that she could not bear to risk it on such a dangerous chance. And yet dinner - parties generally were a decided *gêne* to her. Low within her soul she marvelled why Margaret could not yield to her without saying any more about it. What could it be to her ? and she felt almost spiteful towards the sister who would thus stand in her light. Somehow she could not eat any more of her fast-cooling mutton after that question was mooted, and her heart beat foolishly against its blue-cotton covering.

O dear, O dear ! what should she do,

if she should be left at home to-night in these close dull lodgings, with nothing to do but to picture to herself Margaret sitting listening—pleased, animated, flattered—to a certain deep man's voice, in whose tones she, poor fool, was beginning to find an odd sort of magic, of power to chase away all pain, and to evoke such great, such utter bliss as she had not begun to taste till now—such as she began now thirstily to long to take deep satisfying draughts of? How surprisingly bitter it was to imagine Maggie, by her jokes and little piquant fast speeches, calling up laughter and amusement into a certain dark strong face, which had begun of late to look into the still, private places of her soul as never man's face had looked before! Even if Margaret did not snare the fancy of the owner of that face (as it was sadly possible she might), yet at all events she would have the privilege of being near him, of hearing him talk to other people—would have her fortunate

fingers prisoned for one sweet second in his broad hand. O dear, O dear ! it made her hot and cold in a minute to think of it ; and she pushed away her plate, and drummed a dreary little tune on the table with her fingers to get rid of some small portion of her unpleasant, silly excitement. Certainly it is possible to love one's sister very dearly, and yet at times to wish honestly that Providence had awarded her a cast in the eye or a crooked nose.

Then came comfort in a most unwonted, unlooked-for form : the voice of Mr. Pig-gott, who spoke slowly (for his utterance was always rather impeded, by the fact of his tongue being a size or so too large for his mouth) as follows :

"Do you know, my love, I have been thinking that, if you could make an excuse for me to our kind friends, perhaps it really would be better for me to stay at home. You know, dear ma, I'm not very fond of the night air, and I think the jolt-

ing of the carriage would not do my head any good. So, if you please, my love, I think you shall go without me ; and if I feel well enough, you know, I can take a little stroll along the shore this evening, if I take my time, and don't hurry myself too much. Don't you think so, my dear love ?"

" Yes, love, I daresay you could."

Maggie jumped up, and clapped her hands impulsively.

" My dear Kate," she said, laughing, " let us embrace ; we were on the very verge of hating each other, but uncle Piggott's most judicious suggestion has restored peace to our souls, has not it ? There's no need for drawing lots now, Blount, dear boy, because we can both go."

" So much the worse," said Blount, unfeelingly ; " so much less room for me in the carriage."

" I daresay it will be so much the worse for me, too," replied Margaret, as a recol-

lection of how Fate usually behaved to her came over her; "the chances are a thousand to one that, as usual, nobody will take the slightest notice of me. Of course I shall enact my usual *rôle* of foil to you all evening, Kate—Leah and Rachel over again. I wonder has anybody any idea how tired I am of being Leah. I suppose if I were amiable, I should enjoy it; but as it is, I certainly don't."

"Absurd!" said Kate, with brevity.

But for all that, she was as much relieved as if she had been reprieved from hanging; and, in the satisfaction of her soul, could not help smiling broadly—showing the dear little dimples in her white cheeks—foolish as it was to be so glad about such a trifle.

"I suppose Colonel Stamer will be there?" remarked Blount meditatively.

"Probably," said Maggie; "I saw him driving through Aber Fynach this morning, with one of his sisters, looking as cross

and bored—I wonder why men's sisters' society always has such a depressing effect upon them."

"It has not on me," said Blount, crossing his arms on the back of his chair, and reposing his smooth young chin on them; "at least, I struggle against it, because I know they are a necessary evil. Stamer's sisters are particularly aggravated cases; at least, they look so in church. I hate a person who never looks up from their book, and makes all the responses louder than the clerk."

"You certainly cannot make that complaint of him," said Maggie, laughing.

"No, I cannot. Do you know, my dear loves," he said, with a faint but perceptible mimicking of his uncle's voice, "that your little brother would give a good deal to be as strong as that fellow is? Why, he is about as broad as this room, and as hard as iron," he ended rapturously, turning to his sisters.

"What is the use of physical strength nowadays?" Maggie said contemptuously. "Jack-the-Giant-killer's day is over!"

"Well, there's something in that," replied the boy; "and yet it would be pleasant to think that you could knock down a fellow as soon as look at him, even if you don't mean to try."

"He has got an ugly face enough," said Maggie disparagingly.

"Hem!" answered Blount, "neither one thing nor the other, I should say. I've seen a good many better, and a great many worse; and besides, what does a man's *face* matter? I'd as soon have the face of an ourang-outang as any other, so as I had a good figure under it."

"Well, he is not much like an ourang-outang, whatever else he is like; in fact, I never saw any monkey look half so ill-tempered—they generally have a bland expression of countenance."

"I suppose he will be there," Blount

said again. "I hope so, for I want to talk to him about that army tutor Phillips, you know, at Woolwich. Somebody told me he had been there."

"I *think* he will be there," Kate said in a very small demure voice, entering into the conversation for the first time since it had fallen upon Colonel Stamer, and sedulously turning away her head.

"And might I ask, my young friend, how *you* know?" said her brother, all but overbalancing his chair in his laudable endeavour to get a good view of her averted face; "are you the depository of that gallant officer's plans?"

"No—o," said Kitty, in confusion, "of course not; what stupid things you do say! But I happened to hear—"

"O!" interrupted the boy, jumping up in a sort of ecstasy, as a new and invaluable light dawned on him, "I see now. Well, I *was* slow of understanding. Of course, *now* I know why you were so unac-

countably anxious to go to-night ; it never struck me before—it actually never did ! O Catherine, Catherine, why did not you confide in your brother ?”

“That’s the *last* confidant we should choose,” said Margaret gaily ; “ isn’t it, Kate ?”

“My daughter, will you be so good as to turn your face this way,” resumed the unfeeling youth ; and then, without saying anything, he called Margaret’s attention to the fact very evident, though she was sitting with her back to the light, that Kate had suddenly undergone an unbecoming metamorphosis—being transformed from an unpainted garden lily into the gaudiest of gaudy peonies. She was made to look almost plain by the too generally diffused, too intense flush. It was one of the small family cruelties practised by the Chesters scrupulously to take notice of and point out each other’s foolish, causeless blushes.

“I’m not blushing, Blount,” asseverated

the poor peony, unwisely; it is to be hoped for the sake of her veracity, that she believed what she said.

“Blushing!” said that young inquisitor, with an air of surprise and interest; “O, dear no! What made you think so? Who said you were?”

Then Kate rose up in her redness, and, half ashamed, half vexed, and yet half diverted (if there can be three halves in any whole), she ran round the table, and sprang upon him, soft-handed, boxed his ears, then fled out of the room quicker than the mild avuncular reproof could follow her.

And how did this most foolish of foolish virgins spend most of the glorious June afternoon? Why, in trying which amongst her poor little assortment of head-gears and bracelets and brooches made her by their aid seem most comely. This would be a happy evening, she felt sure. She did not know why she thought so, but she knew it would; and so she would do her best to foil

nature, and, in spite of all defects, would shine lovely to-night, in one pair of eyes, that ought to have terrified her by the way in which, absent or present, they now pursued and persistently looked away her girl's soul. Of course she did not care much about the owner of those eyes, she remarked parenthetically to herself—they were nothing to her; but still he to whom they appertained, was a person whom one might naturally and harmlessly desire to please. And so she figured before the glass; looked at herself frontways, sideways, backways; rubbed her cheeks to see whether she looked better red or white; and finally came down adorned as a flower-filleted victim, to be offered to one of the coarse bloody rulers of Olympus in the old pagan times.

“My dear loves,” was the substance of Mr. P.'s last *baa*, as they prepared to pack themselves into the fly, “be sure you put on your cloaks, all of you, and fasten them well round your throats. You young people

do not know how dangerous the night air is. As for you, dear ma, you must positively promise me to put your hood over your head when you come out of those hot rooms into the cold night air. Indeed, dear love, I cannot let you go unless you promise me this faithfully. And be sure you come back in good time, or I shall be getting very uneasy about you all. And I hope you will all enjoy yourselves, my dear loves; and be sure and make proper excuses to our kind friends for me, and good-bye, my dear loves."

CHAPTER IV.

How I hate shams ! And consequently, by correct logical deductions from my premises to my conclusions, how I hate Llyn Castle ! For is not it a sham of shams ? And it is the more to blame, because it ought to be, and might be, such a delectable place ; nestling on the woody hill - side, looking over the leafy crown of its own spreading sycamores and beeches, out on the wide dark sea. Instead of which it is a positive eye-sore ; at least, to my fancy. A pseudo-castle, with mock towers, rising one above another on the well-timbered-crag, adorned slope. Ivy—that kind garment which beautifies the ugliest wearer—had done its best for the wretched little pinchbeck imitation of feudal grandeur, wrapping round it a wide, thick mantle, of dark-green leaves,

which grew wider and thicker every year. Inside, the house is not nearly so objectionable as one would have supposed, in one's just indignation, at its deceptive exterior; and on this June evening, one would have said that there was not much fault to be found with the dining-room in particular towards half-past seven o'clock. It looked comfort and luxury's self. Windows wide open; air flowing through them, coolly and revivingly, from the "flowering squares" of the garden outside. The effigies of many dead Stammers—some who did evil in their day, some who did well—looked down, smiling graciously most of them, in their immovable serenity, from the well-covered walls. Ladies clad in such easy flowing loose robes that one wonders by what matchless ingenuity they got them to stick on at all; gifted all of them with those snowy, taper, impossible hands and arms which Sir Peter Lely bestows so lavishly on all the subjects of his pencil. Those calm

picture eyes were looking down now on such a scene as they once, no doubt, often took part in; a cheery scene enough, though common as common could be: a party of Englishmen and Englishwomen, dining together, sociable, and hungry — refreshing themselves with pleasant food and pleasant drinks and pleasant chat, after the fatigues of the long hot day. How nice and inviting the table did look, to be sure, draped with snowy, well-bleached linen, shining with much well-polished plate, and with plenty of bright-hued, delicate china, beautiful to the eye, with great piled-up clusters of bloomy purple grapes, with pyramids of peaches and nectarines, and having at intervals, all down its length, big silver vases rough with sculptured figures, perfuming all the air with their heavenly load of roses, some crimson glowing, some passion-pale, of slender, feathery, hot-house ferns, and cool damp moss! How delightfully different from the dinner-table at Breadalbane

House, whose sole adornment was the tumbledown cruet-stand, that never had anything in it! And then the servants—so numerous, so velvet-footed, so attentive—how different from Jane of the dirty fingers!

The Stammers were one of the hundred thousand British families who habitually live in clover, and make no more account of it than if it was mouldy hay; are not conscious, indeed, that it is clover, having been born and brought up in it. There, at half-past seven, this June evening, was sitting Sir Guy Stammer, bald-headed, *beaky*, ill-natured; and there, too, was Lady Stammer, bald-headed, *beaky*, ill-natured; and there were the two Misses Stammer, *beaky* too, neither ill-natured nor good-natured—not bad sort of young women in the main, but, being London girls themselves, rather apt to look down with supercilious pity and oppressive condescension on those dark ones who led a benighted cabbage existence in the country all the year round. And there, too, was Guy

Stamer, Esq., Sir Guy's hopeful son and heir, beaky also—for when beaks get into a family they generally run pretty nearly through it—good-natured, foolish, and horsey; and by him was sitting Kate Chester, with the expression of a small female martyr, and rather a sulky female martyr, on her highly discontented little features. Not a bit was she enjoying the luxurious room or the well-served dainty meats, so decidedly superior to the comfortless style in which she had been living lately,—so utterly displeased with her position as to be incapable of enjoying anything. Everybody else appeared so well satisfied, so calmly appreciatory of their dinner, each one so perfectly undesirous of changing places with anyone else. All but her. As for Blount he was evidently quite in his element. That was a comfort, at all events, dear old fellow! He had got for his share of the spoil the second Miss Stamer, and had actually succeeded in warming that young lady up into

a poor imitation of animation. In the intervals of the general hum of voices, she caught sometimes his jolly, cheery, young tones, talking pleasant, foolish nonsense, and Miss Augusta's faint, high-bred laugh approving him. And then, O cruel Fate ! just over the way, as opposite as opposite could be, was sitting Colonel Dare Stamer, Sir Guy's troublesome younger son, an individual as unlike the rest of his family as could possibly be. To his share the lucky Margaret had fallen, by some mistake as to ages ; and there he was, talking away to her, with that appearance of deep devotion and attention which he always made a habit of displaying towards his next-door neighbour, however little he might care about her ; talking away rapidly and easily, not exactly in a whisper, but what fulfilled all the purposes of a whisper, in that nobody could catch a syllable of his remarks save the person to whom they were addressed. How different from Kate's neighbour ! Every-

one at table (had they thought it worth while to listen) could have heard every word of his speeches; and such stupid things as he said too! such uninteresting subjects! —and nothing new about them either. How wrapped up Colonel Stamer did seem, in making himself agreeable to Margaret! “What can have come to him? Why, he has positively not looked across at me once, though he is only just opposite.” And then, while trying to persuade herself that the hotness of her soup was the reason why she found such difficulty in swallowing it, Kate made an interesting discovery, and this discovery was, how intensely, how accutely pleasant it had become to her to be looked at by this stranger, whose name, heard three weeks before, would have awakened no ideas whatever in her mind. And then, while the servants were handing round the side-dishes, and she was constrained to say “No, thank you,” every minute, there was revealed to her, within her soul, a bottomless

depth, a wild, mad, reckless fervour of passion, which bid fair to blast all the life that lay before her, which had begun its blasting work already, withering up all her little innocent joys with the furnace-breath of its fiery flame, taking the sap out of her girl's pleasures, and making them like the dry twigs on a tree whose principle of life is extinct. That muddy, polluted flood of earthly love (for is not all earthly love, even that of the purest woman, polluted with the taint of mortality?) had, with its bitter waters, swallowed up and choked the spring of higher, better love, which might have refreshed and watered her soul for the garden of God. O, idiot!—to make so losing a bargain with this dull, passing world.

And what sort of man was he who this day had been so lavishly gifted with a great dower of new-born, uncalculating passion? Did he deserve the rich present, or was Kate casting her soul's costly pearls before

swine? This is he. A man with just such a face as one often sees among human creatures, endowed with an ordinary degree of intellectual powers,—of the two, perhaps leaning to the side of superior intelligence,—and with a big powerful figure ; a figure deep-chested, clean-limbed, thin-flanked, that promised strength,—and strength he had—not such, indeed, as Samson's, whose giant gripe dragged down the solid stone pillars and the shrieking Philistine lords about his head, nor such as Guy Livingstone's, who, dying, could crush a massive silver cup between his moribund fingers ; but as much as—not being a prize-fighter by profession—he would be likely to require in his walk through life ; arms long and sinewy, with the muscle—much developed in many a boxing-match, or many a cricket-field—rising in knotted cords upon them ; and a great columnar throat. An ugly man, everybody said ; those who had an eye for form added with enthusiasm,

a magnificent-looking one. Children thought him hideous. A splendid physical conformation certainly. I do not know why it is, but one seldom finds a very lofty, very noble, or very holy mind inhabiting such a dark-haired head, rich in thick-growing, deep-brown locks, regulation cut ; a head rather apt at towering stately over the heads of other men ; penthouse brows that had been seen to scowl ; dwelling under them, in their shadow, luminous dark eyes—eyes that could look very angry or very tender, but which ordinarily only looked rather lazily amused at things in general, seen through the eyeglass stuck into one of them ; harsh, swart features, with the marks of the world's wear and tear upon them, brightened by no light reflected from a happier region, and a great, soft, black-brown moustache, drooping silkily. So much for what all men could see and judge of about him for his outside. Now for the stuff that he was made of inside,

which it required more intimate knowledge to give an opinion of. Not a good man at all. A bad man, if tried by a high standard—that standard we shall all be tried by at last; measured and weighed by the world's weights and measures, a good fellow enough. O, the immeasurable distance between a good man and a good fellow! A dissipated, self-indulgent man, like all the other men in his set. One who walked along life's pathway with his eyes glued to the crumbling dust-heaps of the earth, instead of raised in glad expectancy and awed contemplation to those skyey chambers, built all of pure, untarnished gold, which are waiting for us above the sun and the moon and the stars. He might hug himself with the satisfactory reflection that, during the six lustres of his existence, he had not done one atom of good to any human being, but, on the contrary, had done a good deal of harm: had broken one or two extra brittle woman-hearts; had dangerously cracked

several others; all without much compunction. "Women," he used to say in his club (where he was listened to with the respect due to much experimental knowledge)—"women were fair game;" "and game very easily winged too," he sometimes subjoined. And yet in his soul he kept a higher standard by which he measured just three or four of his female acquaintance, and found them of not deficient stature; but he was as utterly unable rightly to estimate the worth of that best of God's creatures, a good woman, as a mole would be to descant on the radiance of the sun. That line might be well applied to him—

"Bid the hoarse chough becroak the moon."

He had enjoyed, more than he would have cared to confess, making "*les yeux doux*" at this little stranger maiden, whom fortune had sent to lessen the intense bore of vegetating in this dullest of dull holes, and for six weeks, as his affairs made it

otherwise highly convenient that he should. By her aid he had begun to think that he might scramble on to the end, without cutting his valuable throat. The soft luxuriance of Kate's irregular style of beauty—for, after all, beauty of some kind or other she must have had—enthralled his senses a little. She pleased his sated taste more than he could have believed possible. And then she used to say such pleasant, fresh, diverting things, that she quite stimulated his jaded fancy. The point of view from which she looked at things was so different to his, that it really made her rather an interesting study.

Dare Stamer was not very much more conceited than men generally are. He knew he was tolerably successful, certainly. High-bred guardsman that he was, that ugly face of his did more execution than that of an Apollo Belvedere, if country-bred, would have done. He had that thin coat of veneering, that much-prized polish,

only to be acquired by habitually breathing the air of the upper ten thousand, and which holds its own and carries the day with women old and young, experienced and inexperienced, against more solid qualities.

I have said that Colonel Stamer was not more conceited than the generality of men ; but notwithstanding, he had a moral conviction—and in this case a correct one—that a very few more tender speeches, a very few more ardent gazes on his part, would make Kate Chester desperately in love with him. It would be excessively pleasant, certainly, to have her desperately in love with him. Dear little thing ! He had more than half a mind to say the two or three more tender speeches, to gaze the two or three more ardent gazes, that would have the effect of making her so. It would be well worth the expenditure of a good deal of time and trouble to have those great unusual-looking eyes droop under

their white lids guiltily for him, and him only.

But then, on the other hand, Dare somehow felt mistily that this girl was not exactly like other girls. If this girl did love, it would be no trifle with her. There were wells of undeveloped passion in that young soul, whose depths his plumb-line could not fathom. She, he felt sure, was one of those who would think the world well lost for love.

And so a good fit came over him, and he resolved to spare her. It was not his way, but he would do it this once—"if he could," a man more diffident of himself would have added; but his own ability to do anything or forbear anything was what Dare Stamer never doubted. He would let her quite alone—leave her growing on her stalk, dear little fresh lily, till some lucky man should come by and gather her, and wear her with joy and pride, esteeming her the fairest flower that ever grew in the

world's wide garden. As for him, he was too poor to indulge in such a sweet luxury, besides other reasons.

And so, with his good fit hot upon him, this self-denying hero tried to content himself with doing his best to make a fool of Margaret, nor looked once across at the little fresh lily he had renounced. And yet, though he did not look once, he knew and felt, with an odd sort of thrill which he had not indulged in for over ten years, exactly what aspect she wore as she sat there.

"Gowned in pure white, that fitted to the shape," soft-fleshed, soft-eyed, a doleful-feeling unconscious little siren, with one "heavy-folded rose" stuck in by the artist-hand of love amongst the burnished twists of her rich hair,—he knew that the reason why it nestled there solitary was because he had one day uttered a chance condemnation of wreaths. Kate was painfully conscious also, in her guilty little soul, of

having been actuated by this reason, and felt now intensely angry with and ashamed of herself for having let a thought of what this fickle, indifferent, fine gentleman's opinion would be influence her in what regarded her toilet or anything else about her. She felt mightily inclined to tug the great yellowy-white creamy rose, the innocent offender, by main force out of her head, tear it to pieces viciously, and scatter its petals to the four winds of heaven, or else to lay down her head on the tablecloth and burst out crying, or perhaps combine all advantages and do both.

And so the swift minutes flew by, and added their little quota to the great whole of that gigantic ever-growing monster, the past; and Dare Stamer ate his dinner, and enjoyed it pretty well—not quite so much as usual, perhaps; and Kate ate nothing, and kept up her dreary stealthy watch on her *vis-à-vis*.

“How pleased and flattered Maggie

does look, to be sure!" thought the sore-hearted one enviously. "O, if she could but know how unbecoming it is to her to laugh, she would look grave immediately. I wonder what excellent joke that was? Not worth hearing, no doubt. O, if Maggie could but see how flushed and hot her face is! She is not looking a bit well. That is a comfort, at all events. O dear, O dear, how spiteful I am growing! What has made me so odious? What has poor Maggie done to me? I wonder, though, if I am looking as red as that?"

And she took a covert peep at herself in the back of a big spoon. Her face looked very long, certainly, drawn out on the convex surface; but it was as pale as "the naiad-like lily of the vale," to whom Dare in his thoughts had likened her.

And then Guy Stamer asked her suddenly whether she was fond of horses—a sort of test or shibboleth which he applied to all the young ladies of his acquaintance;

moreover, have not the smallest desire to know each other any better.

Such was the case in the drawing-room at Llyn Castle this aforementioned evening, and the result was stagnation. As for Lady Stamer, she could not keep awake after dinner for anything under a prince of the blood. Self-indulgent, as worldly old women so often are, she cast her fat old person into an arm-chair, and straightway fell asleep, like a rude old porpoise as she was. The Misses Stamer did not go to sleep. They sat and fanned themselves, and made low-voiced remarks, and asked their girl-visitors a catechism of low-voiced condescending questions. Did they like croquet? Did they like lawn billiards? Many people liked lawn billiards better than croquet. Were they fond of bathing? Could they swim? Did they like Pen Dyllas? It was a pleasant change for them, no doubt.

Dialogues *de haut en bas* are difficult things to carry on for both interlocutors,

particularly when one side feels indignantly that there is no reason why it should be *de haut en bas*.

As for Kate, it was not much use condescending to her. She was so absent and self-absorbed as to be perfectly unaware whether she was being condescended to or not. It was a matter of the most utter indifference to her whether these aristocratic lean young ladies were civil to her or not. Oppressed with the heat, bitterly disappointed, and heartsore about nothing, she leant one white elbow on the table, and dropped scant "*yeses*" and "*noes*" at haphazard among the Misses Stamer's questions, and was as dull a companion as any little woman need be. It was a pity, for it looked underbred not to be able to talk to ladies; and at any other time, in any other person, Kate would have animadverted upon it pretty severely with her sharp little tongue.

Margaret was much better behaved.

Nature had presented her with a set of manners as nicely made as if they had been fashioned in Mayfair; and she used them every day of her life—at least almost every day. She was mostly disposed to be polite and friendly to every man, woman, and child that came in her way. And so now she did her best to fill up the outlines of the Misses Stamer's sketchy ideas, to practise that hardest of all manufactures, making talk; but it was rather too heavy a burden for one slender pair of shoulders.

There really got at last to be nothing more to say on the subject of croquet, or of bathing either, and poor Miss Chester began to cast reproachful glances at her lazy sister. And then, at last, at last, after two or three false alarms, as of tea and coffee coming in, the few gentlemen did make their welcome appearance—welcome “as flowers in May.”

Now there happened to be close to Kate a vacant chair,—a roomy, comfort-

able chair, made for a person to sit and chat confidentially in,—and it was rather turned towards her. She kept her eyes cast down resolutely, for she knew that there would be such dumb invitation in them if they were to be raised. But though not seeing, she could feel that a two-legged black thing had noticed the desirability of the situation, and was hastening to it. Kate might have known by that haste that it was not Dare. He would not have hurried himself to save his own or his best friend's life.

Not till the two-legged thing was fairly seated, and close to her, did she lift up her eyes with a delicious new-born shyness in them, and raised them to the beaky countenance (the "eagle face" his admirers called it) of her late neighbour, Guy Stamer.

"Do you sing, Miss Chester?" asked at the same moment Dare, in that deep voice which made even silly things sound fine.

And he leaned broad-shouldered against

the mantelpiece with a cup in his hand, and drank his tea—at least tried to do so as much as his moustache would let him—and looked down full-eyed on Margaret, and indulged himself in one surreptitious glance at Kate.

“A little,” said Margaret. (Women always say “a little.” I believe, if Jenny Lind were asked whether she could sing, she would say “a little.”) “Only to amuse myself, though; never in public.”

“O, but we are not public,” said Dare, with polite sophistry; “and, ’pon my honour, we are none of us good judges of music—what you call critical judges—so you need not be shy.”

“Thank you,” said Margaret, laughing. “You need not be uneasy; I do not feel at all shy; but I have not sung in any society but my own for six or seven years, and I am not going to begin again now.”

“How unkind of you!” said Colonel Stamer languidly, looking at himself in a

pier-glass opposite ; "and I am so awfully fond of music too." (He thought he knew "God save the Queen" when he heard it, but was not sure.)

"Why, you told me at dinner you did not care two straws about it," said Margaret, having detected him in a falsehood.

"Did I?" said he, glancing a second time at the pier-glass, and reflecting that his hair wanted cutting. "O, I did not mean it. You should never believe a word I say. I always mean exactly the reverse of what I say ; I find it such a good plan."

Then he moved slowly to the table, put down his cup, and hesitated—

"Sighed and looked, sighed and looked, sighed and looked, and sighed again"—

but finally took the trouble of wheeling the smallest lowest chair he could find close to Margaret,—on the same principle, I suppose, which induced Beau Brummel to drive

through the streets of Brighton in the tiniest carriage he could procure,—reposed himself thereon in lazy strength, and kept up, for the best part of an hour, one of those low-voiced conversations in which foolish, trivial, mawkish things sound so much less foolish, less trivial, more sentimental than they would do if spoken out in an honest loud voice in the ears of the world. And all the time he felt nothing but Kate, Kate, Kate, all through his throbbing veins. As for the rest of the company, Sir Guy followed his wife's example. After sitting very upright for five minutes, nodding and bobbing, and recovering himself with a little start every time, he fell fast asleep, and his dreams were of mangel-wurzels and swedes.

As for Blount, he industriously pursued his project of insinuating himself further into the good graces of the fair Augusta, and succeeded so well that at night he carried off with him the prize of a rather

damaged rose-bud which that young lady had worn all evening on her virgin breast.

And lastly, as for Kate. After receiving Guy at his first coming with positive ferocity, she was now trying to dissuade her brows from curving into a frown every time he addressed her. He, good soul, was perhaps a little dazzled with the light of the green eyes, and not being, at the best of times, quick at observation, was unconscious of her aversion ; so she had just had a second attack of remorse, melted by his forbearance and desire to be pleasant. He had sharpness enough to perceive that his *horsey* talk would not succeed with her ; so he exercised self-denial and laid it aside, and they began to understand each other better. They looked at the photographic albums of all the family, with their heads close together over them ; and Kate tried very hard to be interested in hearing the names of countless people, standing, sitting, and lounging in

various attitudes of studied ugliness, not one of whom she had ever seen or heard of before.

What a relief it was when the folding-doors at length opened slowly, and a stately form appeared in the aperture, whose utterance was such as one can fancy that Pythian voice which came forth from Delphi was. Only there was nothing ambiguous in this oracle. These were the words which the *vates* uttered loudly, solemnly : "Mrs. Piggott's carriage!" O, blessed sound! not likely to be disobeyed: signal to put off constraint and put on ease; signal for Margaret to go home and look in the glass, and marvel, with that unaffected self-distrust and modesty which made her so lovable, why Fate had been so amiable to-night; signal for Blount to go home and put his damaged rose-bud in water, and take out his best studs, and lie down to such slumbers as only greyhound hobbledehoys know of; signal for Kate to go home and take off her

unsuccessful little gauds, and lie awake, and see, all through the quiet hours, that face, as *she* thought,

“Dark, splendid, speaking wondrous things,”

drawn accurately on the sable canvas of night—to ponder on those rugged, swart features, on those deep-set, maddening, averted eyes—to cry comfortably and privately, and long for the brief summer night to be half as short again. Truly, Colonel Stamer’s prudent maxim of “Prevention better than cure” had come too late.

“Well, that’s a relief,” said Miss Stamer, getting up and yawning as soon as the door had closed behind their guests—almost before it had closed.

“I thought they were never going. It is terribly difficult and fatiguing, my dear, to entertain those kind of people,” said Lady Stamer, having just awoke. “I never know what to say to them. One seems to have no subjects in common.”

Just then Dare came back from putting the Misses Chester into their shabby fly, having been unable to resist the temptation of squeezing Kate's little passive hand, and being just in the act of thinking that he hoped she had perceived it. His sister Augusta came to meet him, and made a sort of little mock bow to him.

"I congratulate you, Dare," she said, with a slight laugh.

"What about?" said he shortly; "on having spent the dullest evening of my life, and consequently not having it yet to spend?"

"No, not on that," she answered; "but on having managed so nicely to keep clear of that stupid little pale rustic. I caught the green eyes wandering lackadaisically after you once or twice."

"They are not bad-looking girls, either of them," said Miss Stamer; "only they have no style."

"That is what women always say of

other women, when they cannot discover any other fault to find with them," said Dare sardonically.

"The little one is certainly not bad-looking," said Augusta condescendingly; "at least she would not be, if it was not for that deadful *retroussé* nose; that quite spoils her."

"Dreadful!" said Guy, with good-natured indignation. "Why, I think that dear little nose is the jolliest thing about her, and she is a very jolly little thing altogether."

"She seemed so when she was talking to you, Guy," said his sister with a sneer.

"Do not you know," said Dare politely, and the black eyes flashed wickedly, "that Augusta always makes a point of depreciating any girl who is younger and better-looking than herself."

"You need not get into a rage, and be rude as usual," said his sister rather good-humouredly. "I was not aware that you

would think it necessary to take up the cudgels for the young lady; but, come now," she added teasingly, "you must own that she is a 'green-eyed monster.' Confess that at least;" and Miss Augusta appeared pleased with her own wit.

"I do not know anything about her," said Dare with a scowl, "except that she is extremely pretty and *piquante*, and consequently a mark for the envy and ill-nature of all other women, who do not enjoy the same advantages, to aim at."

"Envious of poor little Kate Chester!" cried Miss Stamer, laughing. "Mamma, do you hear what we are accused of? My dear Dare, what *has* become of the fastidiousness you used to pique yourself upon?"

"Not a good feature in her face," said Miss Augusta with animation.

"Insignificant!"

"The sort of face one would never give a second look at," chorused Lady Stamer and her eldest daughter, as Colonel Stamer

stalked out of the room, in a vile temper his sisters said; disgusted with himself, and infinitely more disgusted with his family. And he did not get into a much better temper even when he had endued himself with a gorgeous dressing-gown, and had established himself pretty comfortably in the balcony, with a cigar between his lips.

“How peculiarly unfortunate I am in my sisters!” he mused. “Well, I suppose they only act after their kind in declaring war *à l’outrance* against every pretty woman they meet. But what harm has that poor little girl done to them? What an idiot I was to imagine she was so ready to jump down my throat that I must, for conscience’ sake, keep from saying half a syllable to her! Conscience indeed! *I* do anything for conscience’ sake! That is something new. What an utter fool I was to debar myself from the pleasure of a little quiet, harmless flirtation with her, when she is the only creature fit to speak to in

this abominable hole! By the bye, that sister of hers is not a bad sort of girl, and not bad-looking either; but she is not to be compared to little Kate;" and his veins throbbed as he thought about her, and a most sweet thrill passed lightly through his captive senses.

"Kate, Kate! what a pretty little name it is! Darling little witch! I wonder what bedevilment there is about the child that I feel so besotted about her. I believe that little white country chit could do anything she pleased with me. How soft and downy she is, like a kitten! only I am morally certain that she would never scratch." (A pause. Puff, puff, puff; smoking away vigorously.) "I hope I am not getting in love with little Kate; that would not exactly do; but there is no chance of that. I leave that sort of thing to boys and old men. Well, one thing is certain, I will not be such a fool again in a hurry, or throw away the good things Providence puts in

my way. If pretty women will fall in love with me, why, I cannot help it; it is my misfortune, not my fault. She was hurt at my never going near her to-night—I could see that. Dear little thing!—I will not gratify those venomous old maids again in the same way. I will take good care of that!”

And then he fell a-thinking that Kate was too pale, and how, when next he should see her, he would do his best to bring the warm colour into those pure cheeks, as he had succeeded in doing once or twice before, and been pleased with the result. But when should he see her again? Well, if opportunities did not come of themselves, he would make them. About this time his cigar came to an end, so he finished it and his reflections together.

CHAPTER VI.

“WELL, my dear loves,” said the benevolent *ovine* voice of the Rev. Piggott next morning, as he came into the breakfast-room slowly and carefully, after his manner, holding out a fat hand to each of his nieces, and presenting a vast expanse of barren cheek to each in turn to kiss, he being meanwhile perfectly passive under the operation,—“well, my dear loves, and how did you enjoy yourselves last night? Very much, I hope. I was very glad to hear you come back in such good time. I had gone to bed, but I was not asleep. Was I, dear Ma? I thought at first that I would try and sit up till you came back; but then, my loves, I thought I had really better not, or I should be so terribly tired and poorly

to-day ; and I am very glad that I did not now, as I am not nearly so giddy to-day ; am I, Mamsey ?”

“No, love, I do not think you are,” said “Mamsey” cheerfully.

How she knew heaven knows, for I do not.

“I missed you very much, my old queen,” continued Mr. Piggott lamentably ; “but you must stay with me all to-day ; indeed you must, my dear love. I do not think I shall ever be able to spare you for so long again. But you have not told me, my dear loves, how you enjoyed yourselves. How did you enjoy yourself, my little maid?” he asked, turning to Kate, for whom, despite her impudence, he had rather a kindness, and who was sitting with her empty plate before her, wan and listless, with a neglected ruffled sort of look, such as birds get in very cold weather.

“Not at all, uncle Piggott,” she said emphatically. “It was horribly dull ; and

I do not care if I never see one of those people again."

"Ahem!" remarked Blount briefly.

It was all the refutation he attempted, and it was ample.

"Well, of course, you need not believe me if you do not like, Blount. I cannot help that, but it is perfectly true," asseverated silly Kate eagerly. "I do not care; and, indeed, I would much rather not see one of them again."

"Ahem!" again remarked Blount slowly and impressively.

"Well, indeed, I thought it was rather pleasant," interposed Margaret, between the intervals of eating her bread and butter; hungry, fresh-cheeked, and wholesomely pleasing to the eye.

"Of course *you* did," said Blount; "we all know that;" and he gave a knowing, highly diverted grin, which grin cut one insane passionate heart, like as a knife would have done, making it ache and heave in bitter pain.

"Why?" asked Margaret, affecting ignorance, but at the same time looking a little conscious, a little pleased, and smiling to herself at one or two nice things that her thoughts said to her at the same time.

"Margaretta, Margaretta, don't affect ignorance of what you know better than anyone else in the room," cried Blount, the tormentor in ordinary to his sisters; "don't you know that it is as wicked to act a lie as to tell one? I should think," he added, descending from the general to the particular, "that our large friend would come and call on you to-day, should not you, Kate?"

"O, of course," said Kate, with a smile that was so sickly it was positively at death's door.

"And bring a gift in his hand," continued Blount, warming with his theme.

"In that case he'll be trebly welcome," said Margaret, laughing; "it may be more blessed to give than to receive, but it is very blessed to receive too."

“And ask uncle Piggott’s blessing, and *mine*,” pursued her brother, following out his own train of ideas.

“I hope you’ll give yours.”

“I’m not at all sure I will,” said Blount, shaking his fair-haired young head. “I never will give my sanction to poaching, and Stamer was Kate’s property.”

“Poor man !” said Maggie, with an amused smile ; “he would be rather surprised at hearing that he was the property of either of us, would not he, Kate ? I don’t think he has the least intention of being anybody’s property except his own.”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Kate crossly, “and don’t care.”

“In the whole course of a long and eventful life,” said Blount, with good-tempered irony, “I never saw complete indifference more successfully expressed ; I think I should advise my Catherine to go on the stage ; she is such an adept at concealing her emotions.” And he patted

Kate's shoulder in a benevolent brotherly way. She pulled her shoulder away sharply from his hand, but could not say a word, good or bad. "Does even *my* delicate sympathy grate upon you?—then you must be in evil case. Kitty, if he was not so big I'd call out the villain that has destroyed my family's peace, and made them quarrel with their bread-and-butter."

"Don't tease her, there's a good boy!" said Margaret, observing the heaving breast and the sudden flushed cheeks of her sister, and guessing pretty correctly the cause of these phenomena.

"Tease her!" replied Blount, with affected surprise. "What do you mean? I was only giving her a piece of advice."

His bump of sympathy for love woes was as yet very imperfectly developed, and he went on in a tone of consolation and soothing, such as one would use to a child who had broken its doll.

"Well, she shall not be teased, poor

little Kitty. She shall have a nice new lover, that she shall; and he is a great ugly black fellow, not worth crying about."

Here he made a second effort to smooth her down, thereby manifesting a more malignant cruelty than ever Master Thomas Torment was guilty of in his dealings with the flies.

"Do leave her alone, Blount," said Margaret again.

She was sorry for the poor little girl, though she was a little fool to imagine that that gay ugly Lothario had ever cared a straw about her.

And then Kate surreptitiously dragged out a small pocket-handkerchief, and dried her wet eyes stealthily therewith, and then thrust it back swiftly into her pocket, and trusted that nobody had seen the *manœuvre*.

And then Daddy Piggott, as he was familiarly styled, spoke up opportunely; for Master and the Misses Chester's conver-

sation had come through Kate's weeping to a rather untimely end.

"And now, my dear loves, I'll tell you what I did after you were all gone last night. Well, dear ma, I must tell you that I took quite a long walk. I went down to the shore and I sat on some stones by the sea for a very long time, and then I was afraid it was getting rather damp, so I went home again, and Mrs. Price sent me up my tea; but to tell you the truth, my love, I'm afraid I did not fancy it very much; and indeed now, while I think of it, I must remind you, dear ma, to try and get us some different tea, for I almost fancy that what we have had lately had disagreed with me. Will you try and remember, my dear love?"

"Yes, love," responded Mrs. Piggott promptly. She always said "Yes, love." I believe if he had said, "And now, my dear love, I think, if you please, that we will cut off your head," she would

have said, "Yes, love," as glibly as possible.

What a grand day it was that day! I remember it as if it had been yesterday. I do not know why, but I always fancy that the last day that will ever dawn upon this world—the day so emphatically called "The Day of Judgment"—will be, as to the aspect of outward things, just such a day. The sun poured out his radiance in full measure, flooding every object, sightly and unsightly alike; not beaming capriciously on one spot, and leaving another cold in the absence of his smile, as his sunship does sometimes, but shining away on all impartially, as if he wished to show what he could do in the way of shining, when he tried. And the sea sent in at the windows the sweetest of all her sweet messages, sweeter than the song of her daughters, the Sirens, which even many-counselled home-sick Odysseus dare not listen to, and this message was

nothing but the plashing sound of many
little restless waves,

“Giving a gentle kiss to every stone.”

And all things on the face of the green
earth seemed to be forestalling the appear-
ance they shall wear,

“When the old world passeth away, and the new
world taketh its place.”

How is it that on such a day, dressed in
the brave attire of its high noon,

“The bridal of the earth and sky,”

there falls on the spirit of the happiest
among us (the least sad among us, I should
say) a tender melancholy, which we would
not willingly have away? Is it because
we know

“That there has passed away a glory from the earth”?

Is it some slight reminiscence, some torn
shred of our original whole garment of in-
nocence, when—O, thought hardly to be
compassed now!—when we had done no
evil? Is it some shadowy remembrance,
some faint recollection, not quite lost in

its transit through all the generations of articulate men, of that time in the earth's rose-hued prime, when, perfect souls in perfect bodies, we dwelt in the garden of God's own planting, in a state of utter (soon forfeited) bliss before there had been any need of

"The sound about us dropping coldly, purely, of
spirits' tears"?

A bliss, too, unrent by the struggles and rack of that most sweet torture, earthly passion. Perhaps it is that on such a day we feel more strongly those dim intimations, those vague conceptions, which even natural religion affords us, of a far country of whose geography we know nothing; where, if it can but attain to it, the soul shall regain her pristine freedom, and more than her pristine beauty; divorced, at last, from her unequal marriage with this present clayey, corrupting body, so soon to become

"A heap, to make men tremble who never weep,"

over whose threshold Sin and Death, that foul mother and foul child, are powerless to set their grim feet. Perhaps our melancholy arises from the feeling of how indistinct and distant those shores loom, rising, in hazy majesty, out of the great sea of eternity; of how thick is the curtain of invisibility drawn between us and them; so thick that no hand of one born of woman can draw it aside; of how heavy the world's cloying kisses weigh on our eyelids, making it so hard for us to lift up our heavy eyes to those Delectable Mountains, whose tops, if we look steadily, we can discern.

There is something high and ennobling, I think, in these aspirations of ours, weak and often intermitted as they are, after something loftier, purer, happier, than is to be found, after much searching, in this tear-soaked earth,

“Where but to think is to be full of sorrow and
leaden-eyed despair.”

There is, I think, in the glimpses we get, broken and fragmentary though they are, of that far-away good land, something exalting, sublime ; particularly if we take as ours Hartley Coleridge's grand definition of the sublime, as

"The Eternal struggling out of Time."

This tender melancholy was not, however, the melancholy that was oppressing Kate Chester. All the sweet influences of earth and air and sky were utterly thrown away on her. It was not the sense of her own mortality nor of anybody else's that had made her out of temper with life, and incapable of eating her breakfast. Since this time yesterday she had made the pleasing discovery that she was fast falling in love violently, and as it now appeared unrequitedly, with a man her superior in station, and in every respect unlikely to prove a satisfactory object for that passion which forms the main plot of a woman's life, and is only a small secondary byplay in a man's.

Yes, the play of her life had begun, and whether it was to be a tragedy or a comedy who could tell? Probably, neither; most people's are neither the one nor the other, —too prosaically free from any great emotions or grand situations for tragedy, too *triste* and serious for comedy. To me most people's lives seem like melodramas without a *dénouement*. The first three or four acts are played; and while we are waiting for the fifth, which is to be the key to all the others, which is to explain all that is unaccountable, and reconcile all incongruities, lo, the curtain drops! The fifth is played in some other world, and we must suspend our curiosity till we get there.

A woman's soul is such a small room that it has only space for one idea at a time: consequently, if a passion, a desire, an impulse lays hold of her, it possesses her with infinitely more force and concentration than it would a man in like case. A woman in love thinks of nothing but her love; a man

in love thinks of his love parenthetically, episodically ; it shares his thoughts with his horses, his trade, his books, his dinner. Yes ; it must be a very exceptional passion that can rival that dearest object of his thoughts, his dinner. Women have decidedly less of the brute, less of the "ape and tiger," as Tennyson hath it, than men ; but *en revanche*, they have also infinitely less of the god. What a digression !

Now, and for many days henceforth, Kate saw all things through the medium of one feeling, so strong that it seemed to have driven all other feelings out of their places in her soul ; to have exiled them out of her being, as having no room for them. In what hues this mad, uncurbed passion painted all things below the sky, in those hues she saw them. And now, in all the sun's genial, living beams, she could see (through the glamour that was upon her sight) nothing but the lurid devil's light of two flashing wicked eyes, that had seen

much evil and had smiled upon it; eyes that from their deep dwelling-places under shaggy brows had sent forth poisoned arrows of lambent splendour, and had smitten her so sorely that hope of healing seemed gone for ever. In all the cadenced murmurs of the salt sea waves, her dazed ears heard but one name. They said to her nothing but "Dare, Dare, Dare!"

"Will you come and bathe to-day, Kate?" asked Margaret kindly, with a woman's instinct of compassion for a sorrow she either had felt or might feel.

"No," said Kate apathetically.

There was a neglected, disconsolate limp sort of look about the blue-cotton frock, which usually sat so trim and coquettish, about the billowy, red-brown hair. What did it matter how ugly and untidy she was? Who would take the trouble of looking at her?

"O, come!" persisted Margaret. "You had much better. It would do you all the good in the world."

"No," replied Kate tartly, and cross this time. "*No; I won't.*"

"Kate, you might infuse a little more courtesy into your refusal," said Margaret, irritated; "people seem to think they may keep all their little rudenesses for their family circle; and, after all, civility costs nothing."

It is infuriating to be taken up short, and snubbed when you meant to be kind. Anger, in such a case, seems a kind of virtue, and puts on the aspect of justice.

"Don't squabble, girls," said Blount. "'Your little hands,' &c. Well, I don't know what anyone else is going to do, but I know I must be off to bathe before the tide goes out much farther. It is so awfully shallow at the best of times in this hole, that one has to walk out half a mile before one can get it over one's ankles."

And he rose up, light haired, light coated, light hearted, and stretched himself, as a dog does, first head and neck, then fore

legs, then hind legs. In no dog's stretches have I seen that order departed from.

"Now, do take care, and not get drowned, dear boy," implored Kate, roused out of her apathy by this fear, which was an event of every-day recurrence. Regularly every day she tormented herself, picturing how Blount's dear, jolly face would look, seen

"Under the whelming tide."

"Can't promise," answered Blount, nonchalantly, holding a bit of bread just out of the reach of poor Tip's most frantically excited jumps, after the manner of teasing young men.

"I *may* get cramp in the water, you know. There's no reason why I should not. There was a fellow drowned that way down at Surly last year," said this condensed essence of Job's comforters.

"Now, my dear boy," interposed his uncle, "there's one thing I must beg of you, and that is that you will go out of the room

a little more quietly than you generally do. I declare the last time that you went out of the room you banged the door so that it went quite through my poor head."

"What! The door did?"

"My dear boy, you know very well what I mean."

"All right! I'm very sorry, but it really is difficult to know what will damage your head and what won't."

So Blount made his exit, whistling a valse, which was never long absent from his lips, and by which his anxious relatives could discern his coming at the distance of several miles.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUR o'clock, P.M. About the hottest hour in all the hot twenty-four. Somewhere near that hour, this day, the fairy who, in that pretty tale which seems pretty even to grown-up children, sent off the fair sixteen-year-old princess and all her attendants in the midst of their drinking, love-making, cooking, &c., into their comfortable century sleep, seemed, for want of better occupation, to have been laying a light finger on Pen Dyllas. Everything there was slumbering—shops, houses, bathing-machines, “men, animals, quadrupeds, horses, donkeys, and ponies.” Even the little hired carriages, which usually kept up a dreary procession in front of Inkerman-terrace all day, in faint hopes of a job, were resting from their

wanderings, and vehicles, beasts, and drivers were all asleep together. In Bread-albane House peace and silence held their sway; Mrs. Piggott was retired out of sight to some distant chamber, where she was ministering to the requirements of the old woman who was to her in the place of a husband, listening, in all probability, to a catalogue of his diseases. So the young Chesters had the general sitting-room to themselves. Blount lay on the sofa, taking an open, unconcealed nap, with his limbs relaxed in gentle slumber, and an ill-used novel standing on its head on the floor beside him. Margaret reposed in one arm-chair with her feet upon another, and pretended hypocritically to be performing some intricate evolutions with a crochet-needle and a ball of cotton; and Kate knelt by the open window, and rubbed her fingers up and down upon the sill, and made them very dusty and dirty, and did not mind a bit. She had a restless fit upon her, and

could not settle to anything. As for going to sleep, that was a thing that would never occur to her again now. She was always so intensely, painfully wide awake. There was nothing to be seen in the road below, but still she looked out. At last an idea dawned upon her. She took a resolution, and her face brightened by just one small shade the less. She rose up hastily, waking Blount very unfeelingly, and passed out of the room. Upstairs she ran lightly, into the upper chamber where, on the two little narrow hard beds, Margaret and she reposed nightly; where they had their small quarrels, and their confidential talks, and their mild abuse of that old bore, Daddy Piggott, &c. Kate dived into a wardrobe, snatched up a hat, tossed it on, without one look in the looking-glass, ran down stairs again lightly, opened the house-door as quietly as might be, and stood out in the glaring street. Truly she must indeed have had some very determined purpose in her mind

to make her brave such a broiling when she might have had the shelter of a good thick roof over her head; and a purpose she had, though, like most of her purposes nowadays, it was a silly one. Up the quiet road to Aber Fynach she went, and through that little dead town, where Lady Godiva might have ridden up and down with impunity every day of the week except market-day. Not a creature did she see about except three depressed curs and one old woman. Then on, on, still on, along the dusty, baking, shadeless high-road, towards the soft, swelling hills. Very few people met her as she went, for most people about Pen Dyllas were sane and of sound mind, but those few (hot as they were) could not help looking with interest at the little white, firm-set face, that looked so business-like; at the little figure trudging along so fast and resolutely, evidently to some clearly proposed end. And then, at length (it was lucky it fell out so when it did), for even

she, although impelled and kept up by her strong will, and goaded on by distracting thoughts, could not have truged on much farther without tumbling down in a faint,—at length, I say, her tired feet brought her to a place where two roads met. To the left stretched a lane that she knew well, where she had often strolled with Blount, laughing mostly, both of them, as they went. A lane where trees twined their lissom arms together, and kissed each other lovingly over the way; a lane where there was twilight even in a summer noon, shady, and dusk, and little travelled. On one side of this lone byroad a thick wood clothed the rising slope. Up a little forest path, into the heart of this wood, with its timely protecting shelter, fled poor Kate, with a last spurt of energy—fled like a hunted stag to the leafy covert—a little stricken deer, with the demon of despair close upon her flying heels. There she fell down weary, and lay all along in the warm long grass,

starred with wild flowers. She buried her head with impatient misery among the moss and the short fern, and all the delicious, profuse, weedy treasures of a June wood, where Nature had been throwing

“All her quaint enamelled eyes.”

They made a very soft pillow for the little glossy head; and the tall grasses, and the catchfly, and the harebells whispered together pityingly, sighingly, as they looked down upon her; while she found some little relief in pouring out the full flood of tears she had come here, through all the hot afternoon, to weep. Yes, this was the purpose—the very silly purpose—which had given her strength to brave the sun, and the long bare road, and the fatigue. Nothing could spy upon her or disturb her here. Neither beast nor man was near; and though a few birds saw her and were sorry for her, yet they were too sleepy to take much notice or say much about her.

How she did weep and wail and moan, to be sure, stirred up to these exercises by that passion which was surely

“No vernal motion of the vital blood,”

but rather that

“Fiery gloom that glares within the spirit’s living tomb”!

She had come here now to have a good cry all to herself, and then to hug her idol for the very last time to her stormy heart; to consider its face—a dead face now; to bury it in this dark wood, under one of these branching trees; to put it away from her wholly for evermore; and then to rise up and go away, widowed, desolate, but mad no more. Yes, she would cry her heart out to-day, if it gave her a splitting headache, that was her own look-out—would think of *him* (the one *him*) for just one half-hour more; would ponder once again over every line of those rugged world-marked features, over every outline of that iron-thewed, gladiator form; would run over

lingeringly once again in her soul all the words that false tongue had ever uttered to her; and then she would say good-bye to him, and go home calm and composed, and never let one thought stray again that way—would go home and begin a new life, a sensible, joyless, sorrowless life; for what could cause her sorrow or joy any more now?—would be a good old maid-aunt to Margaret's children—would save up all her money for Blount; and then at last, she supposed, after a great many dreary years marked by no happy landmarks, she should die and be buried, and there would be an end of her:—a pleasant probable programme for a bewitching little person of twenty, with an insnaring little figure and wonderful green eyes, to map out for herself.

“O, why will not God let us have what we like and be happy in this world in our own way,” she groaned, “instead of making us always be lifting up our eyes strain-

ingly to a country we cannot see, and which we shall most likely never get to at last? O, Dare, I'd do anything wicked, anything insane for you, and you'd not walk across the room to save my life! To think that I could ever have been happy before I knew you! Would I have that time back again when I had never seen your dark cruel face? No: I'd rather be as I am—utterly wretched—than never have heard your voice, never seen you smile upon me as you did that day by the shore. O, such a minute as that would overpay centuries in hell! If I could make a bargain this minute that I should have Dare all to myself for just one month—to be with him always—that he should love me as I love him (ah, no, he never could do that!)—but that he should love me just a little, as I have so often fancied he did—that I might be everything to him, as he is everything to me, for just one month, only a month, and then to die and live in tortures,

for all the countless ages of eternity,—why, I'd do it this second, that I would, without a moment's hesitation. O, if I had the chance of being tried! But God will not let us make such bargains, I know. If He did, life would be starved and death-glutted within six weeks."

Frantic passion, utterly uncurbed, made this girl blasphemous—this girl, who, if she could have had her own wild will, would have been altogether wrecked for time and for eternity. I think we have as much reason to thank God for the prayers He is deaf to as for those He hears.

"O, Dare, Dare," moaned the soft woman-voice again, "what grand eyes you have! How they seem to scorch and shrivel up my soul, looking always, always through it! O, I wish those eyes would look away from me for a little bit, that I might have a little peace! As it is, I cannot eat or sleep or take any rest. They have withered up all the pleasantness of my

life. A pretty fool I must be!—I know that. Such a fool never existed before, I should think. O, if Blount could but see me now!—would he ever stop laughing? Well, there's one comfort—if I do not eat or sleep, I cannot live much longer. O, shall not I, though—a great strong thing like me? It would take a great deal to kill me. I'm not one of those fortunate little ethereal creatures that a breath will knock down. Ugly great fat thing," she said, pinching her own round firm arm quite spitefully, "it would take something to make you crumble back again into the dust I wish you had never come out of."

And so the dreary soliloquy went on, rather the dreary dialogue of self with self—the ravings of an utterly ungoverned soul. One thing I must say in her behalf. She was not a woman to give love uncalled for—to go mad, or die for one who had never wasted a thought on her. In this last fortnight Dare had done his

very best to make her go wild about him; and his *very best* was a good deal, as many ladies could have testified. Sometimes she would start up in petulant agony,

“Plucking the harmless wild flower on the hill,”

and would curse the day on which she was born, and then fling herself back on her grassy couch, and whisper an eager, panting prayer to mother Earth, to take her back to her calm breast,

“Till days go out, which now go on.”

And all the while the great heart of Time went beating on evenly, as it always does, however much poor humanity may agonise to accelerate or retard its still pulsations. And Kate, with her dulled ears, never once listened to the great comforting truth to which all the flowers and the grasses and the insects gave by their beauty a quiet testimony, that truth which the sky spake of through all its blue fields of ether—

"That far beyond this gulf of woes
There is a region of repose
For them that pass away."

In her present state of mind it could bring her no comfort. It was null and void—a dead letter to her. No one, however much in love, can spend his or her whole life, or even a whole day, on the ground in a lone wood; so at last Kate raised herself out of the dry, warm grass, and stood for a moment looking down on her fragrant lair, where the outline of her form was clearly marked out by the crushed herbage.

"Good-bye, darling Dare," she said aloud, bidding him farewell as if he had been present—only in that case she would have said, "Good-bye, Colonel Stamer;" and the sound of her tremulous voice fell softly on the silent wood. "I have done with you for ever now."

And then she turned and went away mechanically. She took out her watch.

and looked at it. Half-past eight! Impossible! Had she been all those hours making these adieux? Well, Daddy Piggott would be in a rage at her coming in so late; but what did that matter? She certainly should not hurry herself for him. And so, with slow reluctant feet she paced down into the lane; for was not unconstraint much better than constraint—was not solitude much more endurable than society? On and on, between the straggling hedges, sauntered the little wanderer, taking her time in a very leisurely manner, and behind her came the sound of a carriage, and the trot-trot of a horse's hoofs, sometimes very distinct and clear, sometimes deadened by some twisting of the road, but getting perceptibly nearer and nearer. Well, what of that? a very common sound. Parties went out so often picnicing from Pen Dyllas on fine days, and came back in the evening. No doubt this was one. Kate felt no curiosity on the

subject, not even enough to make her turn round and ascertain the nature of the approaching vehicle. Trot, trot, trot, on it came; quite close now and then. With an odd thrill of fear, Kate discovered that it was stopping beside her. Such a start she gave, and looked up really frightened. Though death in the abstract a good way off might be sweet, yet robbers and murderers and tramps close by were anything but pleasant. She raised her eyes quickly, and, lo, they encountered the pleasantest sight the earth could have showed them—the rugged world-marked features she knew so well—the herculean shoulders, whose breadth she had just been measuring with her mind's eye. Yes, it was Colonel Stamer, and none other; no wraith or tantalising apparition taking his shape, but himself, in substantial bodily flesh and blood. He had been out on a fishing expedition all day, and had been now bowling along towards home and dinner, quite by himself, without even a

groom, and with his fishing-basket and tackle sitting up on the seat beside him, in the place of a companion. And then suddenly ahead of him, flitting along under the dark green trees, he had caught sight of a little figure that enchained his eyes by its resemblance to a little figure he had been seeing a good deal of lately. He never stirred his eyes from that girl form, and as the distance between them diminished, he ascertained, with a bounding heart, that it had not a resemblance to, but an identity with, that figure he knew of. Well, his star was in the ascendant. Fortune *was* kind, although one wretched little quarter-of-a-pound trout was reposing, as the sole product of the long hot day's sport, in the basket beside him. What good luck to light upon her in this solitary place, all alone, and with no tiresome old duenna to look after her! He might make ever such a fool of her, and himself too, now, and no soul be one atom the wiser. And so, as

he came alongside the unconscious Kate, he pulled his horse up sharply, so sharply as to bring it almost upon its haunches, and an ill light flashed over his face as he turned towards her—a light bred of earthly exhalations—a will-o'-the-wisp, potent to lead astray—a light that came, not from heaven, and which brought no blessing to the woman on whom it fell.

“How are you?” said he. “How fortunate it is meeting you here! I half thought of going round by the other road, as it is rather the shorter; but I am uncommonly glad I did not now. Is not it rather late for a small person like you to be sauntering about these roads all by yourself?” he added, with an assumption of the paternal which was amusingly absurd.

Kate came up to the side of the dog-cart, and stretched out a very ready little hand to him as he bent down towards her,

and her face caught a reflection of the will-o'-the-wisp light.

"It is rather late; but I have been wandering about, and lost my way," said she, not in the least knowing what she said. "No—how stupid I am!—I do not mean that," she added, correcting herself, with a little shake of the head, and a slight confused laugh at her own incoherence. "I have been sitting in the wood all the afternoon, and I had no idea that the time went so fast,"—and she lifted upturned eyes to his hairy countenance. How well upturned eyes do look! Guido thought so, I am sure. His women, saints, Magdalens, virgins, all have their eyes raised to the sky, and uncommonly becoming it is.

"Were you by yourself in the wood?" asked Dare quickly, with a pang of jealousy; and that scowl, which his sisters knew so well, and which his papa and mamma were not unacquainted with, seemed inclined to visit his heavy brows.

"Yes, of course," answered wondering Kate. "I left Margaret and Blount very sleepy at home. Who should be with me?"

"No one, of course," said Dare, relieved. "It was a stupid question to ask. What an idiot I was to suspect her of flirting with any other fellow!" he added mentally.

It was a pretty sight. Overhead the broad green leaves, rustling, shimmering, sighing; and the evening sun, flickering down through their interstices, filtered through their green and gold. Below the dusk winding lane, flower-sprinkled, woodbine-scented, and standing in the lane the handsome well-appointed dog-cart that had but lately ceased to breath the air of its native Long Acre; the flea-bitten gray mare, with her thoughts full of oats, impatient to be off again. And the big gentlemanlike-looking man in light clothes bending down to the small girl, who made such a fair contrast to him. Her face looked so bright, and speaking as she stood

there, with one hand laid on the side of the carriage,

“Half light, half shade: a sight to make an old man young.”

“What a dull evening we had last night!” pursued Dare, anxious to repair past errors, and take time by the forelock; “had not we?”

“Yes,” answered Kate, with more ingenuousness than politeness. “I thought it was rather dull; though, indeed,” she added, remorsefully reproaching herself, “I ought not to say so, for your brother was very good-natured, trying to amuse me.”

“O, if you come to a question of gratitude,” said Dare the conceited, “I suppose I ought not to say anything about its being dull either, because your sister was very good-natured, trying to amuse me.” And his teeth gleamed white under his thick moustache, in a broad laugh.

Intimation on the part of the gray mare that she is ready to move on.

Counter-intimation on Colonel Stamer's part that he is not ready.

"But, seriously," said Dare sentimentally, "I did not have half a minute's talk with you last night. You were flirting with Guy so outrageously, that I felt inclined to knock him down. 'Pon my honour I did; only he is my elder brother, you know, and it would not have been respectful; so I did not."

It was an odd way of stating the case; but it certainly was rather pleasant to have it put that way, and Kate thought so decidedly.

"Well, it was not my fault," she answered. "You know I could not well drag a chair across the room, and sit down by you, on purpose to have a *chât*, because you would not come to me. Why, it would have been Mahomet and the mountain over again." And she laughed with soft glee.

"Do you know," said Dare, changing the subject, not being able to say much

upon it, "I really do not half like your walking home at this time of night by yourself. Suppose," said he,—and he tossed down the basket and fishing-gear off the seat to the bottom of the vehicle,—“suppose you come up here, and let me drive you home? You had much better; and I will give you my word to take great care of you, and not break your neck.”

Kate's heart leaped up at the prospect, but her lips said:

“O, no. Indeed, I dare not; I should be frightened.”

Such a faint negation! An honest, downright “Yes” could not have been more really acquiescent, and a troubled joy streamed over her small up-looking visage.

“Frightened! With me?” said he, in tender scorn. “Impossible! I will not believe that.”

“O, Mr. Piggott would not like it, I don't think,” demurred Kate still, liking

to prolong the pleasure of being persuaded.

Poor old scapegoat of a Daddy Piggott! Much she cared about his displeasure.

"Mr. Piggott be — Please don't drive me to the incivility of using strong language about your revered uncle," answered Dare irreverently. "Why need he ever know anything about it? Who is going to tell the old gentleman? I won't, I promise you." ("Little witch," thought he, "does she know how tantalised I am? She had better make haste, or I will pick her up and carry her off, and not let her go again in a hurry.")

Kate put one small foot on the step, but hesitated still.

"It is market-day at Ryvel, and there are scores of drunken men about," urged Dare, mendaciously working upon her fears.

She looked up to see whether he was telling truth.

"*Do* come, there's a good little child,"

besought the rich voice — besought more plainly still the flashing eyes.

She obeyed those eyes. She thought she could not help. She would have obeyed them whatever they had enjoined upon her, even if it had been her own utter destruction. So this good little child gave him her "flower-soft" hand, and jumped in pretty agilely ; tearing, however, a vast rent in the cotton frock.

"That's all right," said Dare then, with considerable satisfaction at his own powers of rhetoric. "And now, Miss Firefly, if you please, I do not think we will go quite straight home. We will take a little drive instead, if you do not mind. You know it is the best time of day for driving," he added, to the bird he had snared ; and so he turned round Firefly's unwilling head, away from oats, away from stable, and set her off trotting along the road back again in the direction he had just come.

"What a shame !" cried Kate, at this

manœuvre, with a feeling of delightful excitement and wonder at what strange blessed portent would happen next. "I see you are bent on getting a scolding for me." And that was all the remonstrance she attempted.

How supremely pleasant it was being borne swiftly along through the balmy summer evening; the breeze they met, gently kissing away the distressful redness out of cheeks that much crying had made burning hot! All alone with him! Not more than three inches distant from his great shoulder. She did not want him to speak, or anything to happen, only that there should be a continuance of this happy trance. She lived entirely in the present, which is a thing one does not do more than four times in one's life at the most. Hope was merged in fruition. To be quite near him, and to be able sometimes to steal up a glance at his face to assure herself she was not asleep; and she asked for no better boon.

"You've been crying," remarked he at last, after staring at her for a long time with a deliberate intentness, which he would as soon have thought of cutting his own throat as indulging in, in a London drawing-room, to a London beauty.

"Yes," owned Kate reluctantly; "I have — a little. I suppose my eyes look dreadfully red and ugly?" she added, looking up inquiringly at him.

"Dreadfully," replied he. But there was such open fierce admiration in his own that she shrank away under them, thrilled and passive.

"Who's been bullying you?" asked Dare further; "your brother, or your sister, or your uncle?"

"None of them," faltered Kate, still perusing the splash-board, downcast-eyed.

"I should just like to know now," continued Dare, with meditative vague wrath (it did not take much to rouse his wrath), "who's been bullying you, and I'd try

whether I could not teach him better manners."

"Nobody has been bullying me, I assure you," replied Kate rapidly, as red as any damask rose. "I have been bullying myself. I very often do. It's a way I have; and besides it's very wholesome to cry a little sometimes, you know. One cannot always be cheerful, or one would be rather oppressive to one's relatives."

And she tried to make a little joke feebly; for it was impossible to joke, and very hard to speak at all, under the searching flame of his gaze, that had no restraint imposed upon it now in this lonely place.

"What were you crying about? won't you tell me?" he asked very gently, after they had been rolling along a few minutes without speaking.

"O, nothing," she answered, turning away her head in confusion.

"Merely *pour passer le temps*, in fact?" he said ironically. "Well, it *is* tolerably

difficult to make him *passer* at all here ; but I should not think your method made him go any quicker."

"I was weeping over my sins, of course," she said lightly.

"I should not have thought you the sort of person to retire to desert places to deplore your iniquities. Do you often do it?"

"No, not often; it is not good for the eyes; and I know, however soon I wear mine out, that I never can get a new pair."

"There are few sins that ever were committed under this sun that are worth spoiling such a pair for," he said emphatically.

Kate blushed furiously.

"I did not mean to fish for compliments," she said, half indignantly.

He did not pay much attention to her little protest.

"Poor sweet eyes!" said the deep bell-like tones, passion-shaken; "they should

never shed a tear again, if I could help it."

He was getting rather mad; he felt that; and it would not do. He must not go much further; so he prudently looked away. Kate knew that it was very wrong, foolish, improper of her to have trusted herself at this time of day, or rather night, to the tender mercies of this man, whom, through all her blind infatuation, she somehow felt instinctively not to be a good man; who, as I and all his friends knew, was a man who never had any higher guide than his own giant passions, his own curbless will. And then there was silence—a silence that said far more than the voice of a great multitude would have done; a silence when the very air seemed redolent of love; when all nature seemed listening breathless, with curious attentive ears, to catch what the next soft-falling syllables would be. On and on, on and on; by the scented hay-fields, whence the warm gusts came slow

and heavy, "oppressed with perfume;" by the blossoming crofts; by the lichen-painted gray stone walls; by the furzy heathery hills. No doubt it was shockingly improper; but what of that? thought Kate. It was utter unimagined bliss. More murmured, whispered speeches; whispered, though they were out all alone on the quiet road, and not an ear could hear them; whispered, merely because whispers sound so infinitely sweeter. A few more draughts of poison; two pairs of lips sipping out of one cup; more of

"The delight of happy laughter; the delight of
low replies."

A few more intoxicating silences; when, according to Monckton Milnes' rather pretty conceit,

"The beating of their own hearts was all the sound
they heard."

Kate knew the road they were going; knew that it would take them a round of good eight miles; but what of that? Why

should she try to shorten the period of her great joy? Did ever eight miles seem so magically short? Already they are drawing very near a close. It is ten o'clock. Evening has sunk into the arms of night, and the air beats their faces refreshingly with its dusk glad wings, telling of ocean caves and mermaid-haunted sea-bowers. They have rattled through dead Aber Fynach, where the drowsy Welsh are most of them gone to bed, and are rolling noiselessly now down the sheltered road to Pen Dyllas, where the ivy hangs in great leafy bunches over the wall. They have pulled up at last at the corner, where they must part.

"Already!" said Dare, with a deep sigh, half of strong pleasure, half of pain. "I never knew an hour fly half so quick before. I suppose I must let you go now?" he whispered lingeringly.

"Yes," said Kate, jumping up quick, and preparing to take a good bold jump down.

"Stop a minute," said Dare, laying a

detaining hand upon her, whose touch made her quiver and tremble. "I have not said a tithe of what I wanted to say to you. You *must* come out with me again to-morrow; do you hear?"

And he caught her hand, and held it unreprieved, with familiar fondness. And his eyes glittered on her in the holy moonlight.

"O, no, indeed," said Kate, in a troubled whisper, dallying with the prospect of her own happiness. "Indeed I don't think I can. I'm sure Mr. Piggott would not let me," she said, bringing in the unfortunate old scapegoat again.

"Why, good heavens, child! — you would not think of asking him!" exclaimed Dare, startled by her innocence. "Why should he ever hear a word about it? He is not your father. You don't owe him any obedience, you know," urged the sophist, holding her still.

"But what shall I say if he asks me

where I have been when I come back?" inquired this apt scholar in the school of deception, rather ashamed of her own meanness.

"Say!" repeated the tempter. "Why, say that you have not been out all afternoon; that you have been lying down with a bad headache."

He knew his part pretty well. He had played it once or twice before.

"What a good innocent little thing you must be," he said, "that I'm obliged to give you lessons in story-telling, and in all kinds of wickedness!" and he gave a short deep laugh.

"I shall never be a good hand at telling stories," said Kate meditatively, quite content to stand there and be detained by him. "I cannot do it a bit naturally; I blush so, and look guilty."

"Why, have you ever tried it before?" asked Dare, with quick suspicion, more anxiously than he would have cared to own.

"Never!" answered Kate emphatically; and her fair large eyes spoke unmistakable truth. "There never has been anyone that I cared a straw to go out with before."

"Then you must begin now, and do it for me. What harm could there be in taking a little quiet country walk? I won't listen to any more silly doubts. You'll do it for me; won't you, Kate?" he asked; and his voice fell to a very soft key as he spoke her name.

It was the first time he had ever called her Kate, and it was a stroke of profound policy. She could not resist that; she succumbed at once.

"Well, I'll try," she said brightly. "I don't know what time will be best, I'm sure," she added, passing her hand over her brow reflectively. "After dinner, I think; because Mr. Piggott generally goes to sleep then."

"Well, then," said Dare decisively, "listen to me. I will be here at this

identical place at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, waiting for you, and you'll be here to meet me. Yes, you will. You need not shake your head. Are you afraid of trusting yourself with *me*, child? Don't you know you would be safer with me than anywhere under the sun?" And he gazed earnestly, longingly under the shady hat to see what answer the moonlit eyes gave.

"I'll try," again whispered Kate.

"*Try!*" said Dare impatiently, not much used to be thwarted. "You must *do* it. I tell you, you must; and what's more, you sha'n't go till you promise. No, you sha'n't—not an inch, if you stay here all night," he added, with the same short laugh he had given before.

"Well, then, I promise," said Kate, loving him too intensely to fear him; "and now let go my hand. Have not I done just what you told me? Please, let me go. *Please.*" (Very imploringly the last "please.")

So he loosed her arm. He let her go, as a cat lets a small mouse go a little way, still keeping it, in reality, between her paws; and she jumped down agilely.

"Good-night, Kate. Remember!" were Dare's last words, bending down for a last look.

"Good-night, and thank you for the drive," said Kate gaily; and off she ran swiftly, down the still road.

CHAPTER VIII.

Poor erring Kate ! She had no father to look after her. What a claim for commiseration for any poor young thing to be possessed of ; what a plea for treating errors, and shortcomings, and indiscretion, with a lenient tongue ! Her father, before God took him, had been a good man, and a just, but she had never known him, except by hearsay. He had been a hard-working barrister ; likely to make a name in the world, men said ; but God said differently. His sun went down while it was yet noon ; sank below this earth's horizon into the great flood of Eternity :

" So sinks the day star, in the ocean's bed."

Sore sickness and gnawing pain sapped the slight walls of the bodily house, till

they tottered and fell ; and the house was laid even with the earth ; and no earthly builder could ever build it up again ; but a heavenly builder shall. He departed this life, but he did not leave his infant children penniless to the cold wild world, or, worse fate still, to the tender mercies (sometimes tender enough too—sometimes niggardly doled out) of relatives and friends. Poor, they certainly were : witness the shabby cotton frock (the faded sheath of a fresh flower) ; but, for all that, they were independent. They need not be governesses, or schoolmistresses, or spend themselves in any such sad woman-trade. Their obligations to Mr. and Mrs. Piggott were not of a pecuniary description, else they might have been induced to treat the old south-down with less disrespectful levity and more gratitude. However, now there was nothing much to be grateful for : it was a mere case of mutual accommodation. And then, a month or two ago, it had occurred

to the two Chesters (both being fully agreed this time), that old Daddy Piggott certainly was an old bore, and that it would be a decidedly more agreeable state of things if they were to have a little house of their own (even ever such a little one) to rule over, and be as untidy as they pleased, instead of being for ever pinned on to the clerical skirts of the Piggott establishment. Consequently, after much deliberation as to the place where for this new domicile, after listening attentively to much good advice from generous friends, and carefully avoiding taking any of it, they had acted for the first time in their lives for themselves, and had picked out a small nutshell to deposit their pretty selves in ; and it was now (this 17th of June) exactly a month till they were to take possession of it—exactly a month longer for them to tarry in the sheepfold. Kate had been telling Dare of this fact to-day, and he had said with three parts of serious and one part of joking

in his speech, that he would take upon himself to escort them to their new home when the day should come. Blount should take care of Margaret, and he himself would look after Kate ; and he had asked whether it would not be nice, and she had said, "Yes, very, very nice," like an utter little fool as she was. Meanwhile, Miss Kate's truant feet had brought her to the hospitable portals of Breadalbane House, and she gave a bold knock, and rang a bold peal, though her heart did quake a little, for it *was* so late ; but luck was her portion this day at least. Along the passage came, with a long-wicked tallow candle, Mrs. Price, the once nurse, now maid (a metamorphosis almost as regular in some families as chrysalis into butterfly).

"Why, my darling child," she said, opening the door, and the tallow candle flared with surprise too, "where upon earth have you been all this while?" and her good-natured face looked excessively

wondering. "I have been in such a fright. I did not know what upon earth to do about you. Do you know what time of night it is?"

"O, yes, I know all about it," said Kate; "but, my dear old woman," she cried, enfolding Mrs. Price in a close embrace that owed its birth more to fear than affection, "your fright *can* be nothing to mine. Just picture to yourself the scolding I shall get: prison-diet, solitary confinement, and a lecture that would reach from here to Ryvel. I anticipate nothing less."

"O, as to that," responded Mrs. Price, shutting the door, "they're none of them at home. They went out driving in one of them ould carriages after tea, and they haven't come back yet. I wonder they are not back; Mr. Piggott so fidgety about himself, and so fearful of the night air too."

"Praise Allah!" said Kate, drawing a long breath. "Then they need never know

anything about it ; and you won't turn informer, will you, you dear old lady ?" she said, laying an anxious little hand on each of Mrs. Price's shoulders.

" No, darling, I sha'n't say nothing about it," responded the accommodating Mrs. Price ; " but where have you been ?—for it certainly is audaciously late for you to be out all by yourself."

" O, I don't know ; I have been sitting in the wood," said Kate lightly ; " but where's Blount ?"

" He went out with one of them nasty guns just now, and I wish he'd come back again. I am always so frightened of his shooting himself with one of them horrid things."

" O, nonsense," said Kate ; " there's no fear of that ;" and upstairs she ran, relieved in mind, having snatched the tallow candle out of Mrs. Price's grasp. Broad awake all through the rolling hours, she

" Failed to draw the quiet of the night into her blood,"

and then sank into a short light morning slumber, and was waked by the light flowing in under her eyelids from the scant-curtained window. Before full consciousness returned, she had a feeling of some weight of blessedness belonging to her, something delightful that had happened, something more delightful still that was going to happen, some rich jewel in the treasure-house of the future waiting for her to wear. And then she sat up, and jumped out of bed, and ran barefooted to the window, pulled aside the blind, and peeped out. The newborn day, climbing swiftly up out of the eastern chambers that had seen his birth, was a mighty infant, worthy of his glorious predecessors, smiling broadly, not weeping—as mortal infants, prescient of fate, do—at his first glimpse of the awakened earth. According to the ancients' lovely fable, Aurora had just risen out of the saffron couch of Tithonus, and was floating rosy-fingered through the

kindling sky. And then Kate peeped into the looking-glass ; rounded cheeks, slumber-flushed ; tangled disorderly hair ; eyes of the colour of sea water, lying unsunned in an ocean cave ; smiles, dimples,—this was what she saw.

“What are you making such a noise about?” grumbled Margaret, with sleepy indistinctness. “Do go to bed again.”

To bed again ! No, indeed. On the contrary, Kate dressed quickly, ran down stairs, and went abroad to meet the morning, under the high clear sky. Through the green fields, where the grass, dew-drenched, was shedding myriad pearly tears of joy at the departure of darkness and the coming back of light ; where the daisies and the buttercups were half unclosing their coy lips, under the kisses of their kingly lover. Through them all she went, and then passed down to the shore of the great sea whose breast was heaving gently for the love of Hyperion, the mighty

sun god, who was smiling welcomingly, coquettishly, under his burning eyes, through all her countless waves. Kate strolled along, her whole being saturated with pleasure, ran for very light-heartedness races with Tip, and got once or twice nearly tripped up by that excited animal getting under her feet; and she threw stones, splash into the water, and stood and watched how the small ripples stole ever noiselessly, insidiously, further and further up on the tawny sands. She made acquaintance, too, with the seagulls, both those which flapped heavily, white-winged over head, and those which sat gravely in vast conclaves—a sort of gull parliament—on the ever-diminishing beach. And so she came back, looking more like a dog-rose than any lily, to breakfast, and fancied she was ravenous for coffee and bread-and-butter; but, lo, when the coffee and bread-and-butter came, she could not touch them; the inward excitement would not let her.

The morning, certainly, was rather hard to live through; there are so many hours; such a great number of minutes in a whole morning, from breakfast to dinner! O, if one could unpick some patches of time from one part of one's life and tack them on to another! If one could take from the superfluity of some dreary days, to add to the scant measure of some beatific moments! But we are not allowed to practise these ingenious sums of subtraction and addition. And so Kate first took up a little red stocking she was knitting, and after knitting three rows, dropped a stitch by reason of the absence of her mind, and threw it aside disgusted. Next she tried to read some of Lamb's *Essays*, which, in better times, had been very dear to her; a dish whose delicate flavour her mental taste had highly relished, but now their tone was too healthy and wholesome to tempt a diseased palate; and the book was soon shut up. Then she read Byron's *Francesca of Rimini*, and found

that answer better. That exquisite tale of hopeless, boundless passion spoke to her soul a language that it loved, and she never thought of taking to herself the warning—

“How many sweet thoughts, what strong ecstasies,
Led these their evil fortune to fulfil?”

“He who from me shall be divided ne'er”

was the line that she took to herself; and she said it over softly, with a confident smile, and then the volume fell back into her lap, and she tried how doing nothing answered, and found that it answered best of all.

One o'clock at last: only three hours—180 minutes, until the gates of Paradise should be thrown open. Ah, but then dinner had to intervene, and dinner is rather an ordeal. It lasts so long, and people talk so much at it, and introduce so many subjects, and one cannot get up and rush away, when one feels that the room is getting too hot to hold one. But, however, it must be gone through, there is no avoiding it, and

here it is, being borne up the narrow stairs by Jane of the dishevelled locks; and here, moreover, comes Blount, too, carrying a dead gull, whose sudden death he had just succeeded in effecting.

“Ah, Blount, you horrid boy!—do take the dreadful thing away!” cried Margaret in an agonised voice, hiding her face with her hands, while Blount stood at the door—sunburnt, knickerbockered, deriding her terrors.

Then Kate danced out of the room after him—her feet positively refused to walk to-day; they *would* dance to a little song that the heart had written for them, and the senses set to music; and she executed various gymnastic feats around him, and pulled his hair severely, and pinched him, knowing that having his hands full he could not avenge himself on her. No more he could; he stood there helpless.

“You idiot!” he said politely; grinning and diverted, but contemptuous. “What’s

made you so uncommonly jolly to-day, all of a sudden?"

Kate was rather a phenomenon to her brother and sister to-day, by reason of her transformation from *Il Penseroso* to *L'Allegro*—from the rapidity of her rising out of yesterday's blues into the seventh heaven of to-day. They both, being sharp young people, had their suspicions concerning her.

"Could she have met that man out walking yesterday?" pondered Miss Chester; a little vexed, and only a little, at the thought.

People who know each other very well, near relatives, intimate friends, and the like, understand the dumb language which we all involuntarily make use of, full as well as that other spoken language of which the tongue is the vehicle. The Chesters could both speak and read this language fluently, and so they both smelt a rat, and made internal resolutions to set traps for that obnoxious little beast. And so, and

so (as one used to say in the tales one used to spin out of one's empty, infant brain, to one's compeers, all listening with rapt attention); and so they went to dinner, and Daddy Piggott baaed a grace, and they all ate and drank; at least such of them as could. And the meat passed away, and the pudding passed away, and all went smooth as satin—as cream, and none but the most perfectly innocuous themes were even hinted at.

Two o'clock and the danger over. Well, not quite; although Blount did get up and walk to the window, saying recitatively—

“Fate cannot harm me; I have dined to-day.”

“Mr. Piggott,” began Margaret, “don't you think we'd better have another drive to-day; it was so pleasant yesterday, and you know it is so much wholesomer, driving than walking this hot weather, and you see it has not done you a bit of harm, being out a little late?”

Miss Chester was generally not too partial to taking carriage-exercise with her uncle, but she made this remark with an object.

"Well, indeed, my dear love," replied Mr. Piggott slowly (for how could he talk fast with the plum Nature had put into his mouth?), "I am almost inclined to think that it would be a good plan to take a little drive—not a very long one, you know, my love. I was a little nervous last night at being out so much in the night air; but I'm really in hopes that it has not done me much harm. My head feels really very tolerable to-day. But what does dear ma say? Do you think I might venture, my old queen?"

Need I say that Mrs. Piggott made answer:

"Yes, love."

It was her formula. She said it as regularly as the clerk says "Amen" to the parson.

"And you'll come too; won't you, Kate?" pursued Margaret tentatively, observing her sister narrowly, with a rather meaning look on her face. "I know you are so fond of driving; you said so only the other day."

"No, thank you; I think not," stammered luckless Kate, pretending that she had dropped her pocket-handkerchief, and diving under the table for it. "I—I've got rather a headache."

"A headache!" exclaimed Blount, coming back from the window, with broad incredulity. "O, come now; that is a fine idea, after the way you were rushing about before dinner, making my life a burden to me. A very funny sort of headache it must be, I should think."

"O, indeed, my dear little maid," interposed Mr. Piggott, "if you've got a headache, I really should not advise you to go out of doors at all. If you take my advice you will go and lie down on your bed, and

keep very quiet, and try to take a little nap, dear love, and get Mrs. Price to bring you up a cup of good warm tea; or else, perhaps, Maggie will kindly bathe your forehead with eau-de-Cologne, as dear ma does mine, when I have one of my bad headaches."

"O, it's not so bad as all that," said Kate, unable to help laughing, despite her vexation, at all this paraphernalia of remedies for a disorder that was purely imaginary; "it's only rather uncomfortable."

"She has not got a headache at all," said Blount—indignant champion in the cause of veracity—to his uncle; "she's only pretending. She has no more a headache than I have."

"Did not I hear you say, my dear love," inquired Mr. Piggott,—rather confused by these opposite statements, appealing to Kate—"did not I hear you say that you had got a headache?"

"Well, it isn't exactly a headache," explained Kate, shifting her ground, and sinking deeper at every step into the slough of lies; "it's only that I don't feel very well. It's a sort of indescribable feeling," she said, delighted to have hit upon so vague a complaint.

"O, then," said Margaret, with a malicious smile, "a drive will be the very best thing in the world for you—much better than wandering about the roads all by yourself, which must be dreadfully dull, too;" and she laid a slight accent on the words, "all by yourself," and gazed steadily at her sister, encouraged by an approving look from Blount.

Kate could not return that gaze; she lost her temper instead.

"I don't know what business it is of yours, Maggie," she cried, with uncomfortably hot cheeks and blazing eyes—a small wild beast at bay; "or yours either, Blount. I wish to goodness you would

go off and shoot some more ugly sea-gulls, instead of staying and teasing here."

"Indeed, my little maid," interposed Daddy Piggott blandly, "I must say I think that Maggie is quite right in what she says about your wandering about the roads, all by yourself." (He was an old fellow who paid a good deal of attention to the *bienséances* of life.) "Indeed, my love, I do not like it at all. You know you were not in at tea-time last night; and I do not think it is at all fit that you should be strolling about by yourself so late in the evening. You know the night air is very injurious; and besides, my love, one does not know what kind of people you might fall in with; so I hope, my dear love, you'll take dear Maggie's advice, and come out for a nice quiet little drive with dear ma and me!"

At Mr. Piggott's alarms at the sort of people she might meet, Kate blushed furiously. Even the soft round throat caught

some of the crimson flush, as the moon on a summer evening sometimes reddens under the gaze of the dying sun.

"Well, then, you *will* come, Kate?" reiterated Margaret cruelly, amused at the success of her Machiavellian policy.

"Yes, dear love," Mr. Piggott answered for her gravely. "I shall expect you to be ready to come out for a nice little drive with dear ma and me this afternoon, unless you have any very particular reason to the contrary," he added, roused to something like suspicion. "Do you hear, my dear love?"

"Good-bye, sweet Kitty," cried Blount, from the door, in mischievous exultation, firing off a parting shot; "I do hope you'll enjoy your drive."

And Kitty succumbed.

CHAPTER IX.

“WHAT is truth?” quoth jesting Pilate; only, begging Bacon’s pardon, jesting Pilate was never more in earnest in his life, and with good reason. What is right, and what is wrong? Where does one end, and the other begin? Where does the boundary-line come? It seems to me, sometimes, so thin and faint a thread, that it requires careful, diligent, honest search to trace its course exactly, even in the high noon of this nineteenth century of ours. I marvel much, pondering upon those lamps that the past has hung out for us to gape and stare and wonder at—those grand old Greek heathens. Groping, as they did, in such utter darkness—rather, perhaps, I should say, such a dusk twilight—owning no light at

all, save faint emanations from within, from their own clear spirits, helped on and kindled into broad sunlight, by no aiding light from without them, from some higher sphere. The great world-concerning truths we know for certainties that we possess as heritages, through no merit, by no labour of our own, they felt after with blind hands, vaguely grasping after something, they knew not what; they strove to work them out for themselves, and could gain but blurred, indistinct outlines of them. Whence did they get their conception of the *καλον καγαθον*? What could they know of the beautiful, or the good, save the materially beautiful, and the materially good, with which their own fair Hellas was so lavishly dowered? Whence, save from some instinct planted in their own subtle minds, did they borrow their lofty ideas of honour and fortitude and purity? Not from their religion, certainly; a religion totally unallied with, divorced from,

morality. By precept it did not teach them these good things, for by precept it taught them nothing, being in no degree a doctrinal religion, but merely and entirely a sacrificial one ; and by example it assuredly taught them the contrary of all these high qualities. A religion of the earth, earthy ; bearing so plainly on its features the stamp of its parentage that one wonders how any intelligent being who thought at all could ever ascribe to it any other birth, so self-evidently was it a daughter of the brain of men, and of sensual, impure men, too. A lovely, voluptuous mythology, with its gods and goddesses sitting

“Distinct in dissolute beauty,”

perennial, amaranthine bloom, by their nectar, on the heights of cloudy Olympus. Men and women in everything but their freedom from the dominion of death ; men and women with stronger passions and

greater power of gratifying them. Persecuting human creatures with their irresistible loves ; wreaking their petty spite and jealousies and feuds upon them ; making men only conscious of their divinity by the curses it brought upon them. Gods, indeed ! Foul demons, rather, set up in high places to be the scourge of the dwellers on earth. With such examples before them how did the great men of old manage to perform such high deeds of virtue, and endurance, and self-sacrifice as they did ? Even we, as I said before, rich as we are in a glorious illumination from above, find it (through the film that is ever on these mortal eyes) hard sometimes to say positively what is good and what is evil. The excess of virtue becomes vice sometimes. At what point does it cease to be virtue and begin to be vice ? To come down to what I have been tending to all along, when does love cease to be the most ennobling and highest of our purely natural

impulses? When does it begin to be a crime, an idol set up in the heart?

All these sage reflections arising from the fact that Bredalbane House had a back door! Not that I mean to say that Kate's love passed from the realms of virtue into those of crime at the very moment when she first began to let her thoughts dwell significantly on that back door. It had ceased to wear the garb of a virtue some time before it excited her to think of surreptitious exits and entries; it had become to her a master, a god—an exacting master, a tyrannical god. But there is nothing easier than to walk out by a back door, nor, in some cases, more convenient. Kate's fuming spirit turned to it, and resolved that it should not stand there, leading into the cindery lane behind, in vain. It was positively unendurable, the thought of keeping Dare walking up and down there, waiting for her, so offended most likely at her faithlessness that he

would never ask her to come out with him again. Earth, too, has such a few utterly bright moments that it is only a reckless spendthrift that would throw any aside. Dare would be frowning, his great dark brows would be coming together, as she had seen them do once or twice. How stern, how grandly thunder black he looked when he frowned ! Would not anything in the world be better than rousing that strong lion to wrath ? Merely to gratify a ridiculous whim of old Daddy Piggott's, too, of all people in the world ! And she owed no obedience to him either ; Dare had said she did not. Thus mused the bird, fluttering nearer and nearer to the cat outside its safe cage. Consequently on these reflections, at about ten minutes to 4, P.M., a young person stole very, very quietly out of the parlour at Breadalbane House, and ran up-stairs, silently as night, to the narrow-bedded little upper chamber to get her hat, and to make herself look fair in

the eyes of him she loved. In she burst, hasty, unsuspecting, and came face to face with Margaret. Poor Kate! One big start she gave; after which she did her best to recover herself, turned aside to hide her guilty cheeks to a chest of drawers that stood kindly near, and pretended she had come up to hunt for a ball of cotton, or a pair of scissors, or some such feminine valuable.

"Where are you going, Kate?" asked Margaret coolly, in a voice in which amusement and irritation were mixed in equal parts.

"I'm not going," began Kate, with great fluency; but the lie died on her lips half spoken.

"You're going to meet Colonel Stamer somewhere," replied Margaret, with great distinctness of utterance. "Come, now, don't tell stories. You know you are as well as I do." And she came round to watch the effect of her words on her sister's

face, which had quarrelled with her tongue, and refused to lie in consort with it.

"No, I'm not," lied Kate. "Yes, I am," she cried in a breath, taking a sudden resolution; and she faced round and braved the cruel light. "He only asked me to go and take a quiet little walk with him, when I met him yesterday, and I said I would; and what harm is there in that?" She said thus much with downcast eyes, and then got excited with her theme, and appealed imploringly to her sister. "O, Margaret, don't try and stop me! I shall only do something utterly idiotic if you do. I know I shall! O, *do* let me go—*do*, dear, sweet Maggie, and I'll do you a good turn some day when I have the chance! O, Maggie, please don't stop me!"

Now Margaret Chester was a young woman who would as soon have thought of flying in the air as of moving a finger to nip any love-affair in the bud. Her sole object this day had been that of giving

Kate a little fright, and proving to her how utterly futile her weak little endeavours at concealment had been. And so now she spoke with a slight tincture of good-natured scorn in her voice.

“Stop you, my good child! How could I, if I wanted ever so much? and I’m sure I sha’n’t try. It’s no business of mine. I only wanted to show you that you could not steal off to meet your lovers without my finding out. I’m sure I wish some of your admirers would carry you off. I *am* so tired of these never-ending flirtations.”

“This is not a flirtation,” answered Kate, drawing herself up, and feeling remarkably dignified. “Da—Colonel Stamer never flirts with me.” (O, Kate!) “O, Margaret, you do not know what he is to me!” she went on, lifting up her eyes, with a rapturous light in them. “I don’t know what is come to me, I’m sure; but of late I have felt, when I have been with him,

that nothing in this world or any other world could make me very unhappy, ever again. You need not tell me I'm a fool, as I see you are going to, because I know it already."

"He is a dreadful *roué*," remarked Margaret consolingly. "Blount has just been telling me about him. Young Wilson told him to-day that he was about the fastest man in the Coldstreams, and I'm sure he looks it."

"I don't care," answered Kate, walking up and down the room, with fingers twisted together, and the rapt look in her eyes still. "I don't care how wicked he is. I should not love him a bit the less if I were to know that he was as wicked as sin itself. He is more to me than all the good men that ever were born."

"I'm afraid he is making a very great fool of you," observed Margaret, regarding her as one regards a "*lusus naturæ*," a three-legged hare, or a two-headed chicken.

"I don't care what he's making of me," returned Kate, hopelessly insane. "O dear, O dear, how late it is getting! He'll be waiting. Let me go; there's a dear good Maggie."

"But what shall I say to Daddy Pig-gott?" inquired Maggie, puzzled.

"O, say that my headache got worse, and that I really had to lie down after all," said Kate quickly; as fertile in inventions as Ithaca's subtle king.

"Then he'll be sure to send up aunt Harriet to see you, with some potion of his concocting," objected Maggie, further.

"O, say I'm asleep—say I'm dead—say anything;" and Kate dashed about the room, collecting the various articles of her toilette in a frenzy of haste; totally regardless of the falsehoods she had been scattering with so lavish a hand.

"Here, I'll get your hat," cried Margaret, good-natured and helpful, having got over her small attack of the spleen,

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“and go down-stairs very gently, because old Piggy is in his room; and don’t let that bad man make too great a fool of you.”

And at last Kate did get off in good earnest.

CHAPTER X.

THE corner of a shady road ; gray stone walls, ivy-draped ; donkeys standing in a row, saddled, drooping-headed, waiting to be ridden and belaboured and generally ill-used ; boys, appertaining to the said company of asses, playing marbles on the *trottoir*, chattering harsh Welsh—the ugliest of all ugly tongues ; and, lastly, a big gentlemanlike man in light clothes, with a cigar between his lips, puffing away, and walking up and down rather impatiently.

“Why the deuce does not she come ? What’s keeping her ? I’m sure she’d come if she could. Has that old woman of an uncle stopped her ? What a blessing it would be, to be sure, if girls had no uncles and fathers !”

Five minutes more ; several turns up and down ; much puffing.

“Curse that old noodle !”

Take back that curse, O Dare Stamer ! rightly (to my thinking) called bad—O, fine body and starved soul !—for behold there comes now on the stage a small woman running very quickly, who, when she catches sight of you, drops into a decorous walk.

“O, here she is at last ! Hurrah ! I wish to heavens I was not quite so glad to see her !” and Dare threw away the end of his cigar, and advanced with less stately languor than he usually practised to meet her.

He took her hand, and holding it, looked down from his six-feet-two to her five-feet-three with glad possession.

“Good little thing,” said he approvingly ; “here you are at last.”

“Yes,” panted Kate, “here I am. I have got off at last. I really began to

think at one time that I never should. I ran all the way, and I had to tell Margaret, because she found out."

Her breath failed, and she stopped.

"I'm sorry for that," answered Dare, in an annoyed voice, and his brows, always ready and willing for a frown, lowered slightly, after the fashion Kate admired so much. "I don't see what concern it was of your sister's. I wish you could have managed not to have told anyone; but, come, let's get out of this glaring road as quick as we can. I have no desire that your uncle should find us here together."

So off they went, away from the garish eyes of Welshmen and Welshwomen, away from all eyes but each other's, on a *quiet country walk*, down deep Welsh lanes, whose long tresses that ogre, high-farming, had not reduced to the dreary shortness of a convict's locks; where wild roses stretched out their long sweet arms to detain them as they passed; where vetches

and little pansies and ragged robin, so fair in its pink tatters, were sprinkled so thickly that it seemed as if Nature, passing quickly by, had tossed them out of her basket, as too common to be kept for her dearer haunts. There foxgloves stood up tall above the other flowers, like the church does above the low roofs of the village, all of them doing what they were intended to do—calmly, unfailingly performing their easy mission of being lovely. And they passed (this pair) through green cornfields that the sun had not yet put into his crucible and transmuted into gold; and the spirit of the summer, unperceived, unheeded, went with them, and heightened their joy—added her quota to their great bliss, though they took no notice of her, or of any of her presents to them, nor were a bit grateful. And the rosy hours whirled round in their mazy dance, with their hands linked in those of the Graces; and Dare and Kate strolled along, along (a

goodly pair to look upon), through the smiling land, talking the sweet sentimental nonsense which forms the conversation of undeclared lovers ; and sometimes they did not talk at all, but I don't think that the silence was irksome. At last Kate pulled off her hat, and pushed the hair away from her low forehead.

"I'm tired," she said, looking up at him in whose company she never could feel weariness of the soul.

"Tired ! Are you ? Poor dear little thing !" Dare answered, and compassion made the deep voice as soft and low as a summer wind at evening tide—dreadfully soft that voice could be when it chose. "I'd better carry you a bit, hadn't I ?" he asked, with a caressing little laugh. "What a feather-weight you would be !" he said, gazing at the white rule-defying profile beside him. He felt strongly inclined to do as he said, and take her up there and then. He would have given up

his pay and his allowance for the next two years, and all his studs and pins, for a good deep bridgeless brook, or anything else that would have afforded him a decent pretext for so doing ; and truly she would have been as a baby in his arms.

"No need for that, I think," said Kate, swinging her hat to and fro for something to do ; and the idea of being carried by Dare brought a *soupeçon* of shell-pink into her cheeks.

"Let's sit down and rest," said Dare. "It's awfully nice on the grass in this bit of shade."

It *was* "awfully nice ;" but was it "awfully" wholesome ? I think not.

"I do not know what has made me so tired to-day," said Kate, and she closed her eyes, giving Dare scope for gloating over those fringed wonders, the thick white curtains that fell over them so softly. "I suppose it is because I did not sleep last

night," she added, withdrawing the fringed curtains again.

"And what kept you awake?" asked Dare, with tender interest, coming a little bit nearer.

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Kate briefly, not feeling equal to a catechism on that theme.

"Was it the scolding you got last night for going out driving with me that hindered you?" he continued. "I'm afraid I always bring disagreeables on anybody I love or like," he ended despondingly.

"I did not get any scolding," said Kate, looking down. "I have no doubt I should have done if anybody had known about it, but they did not. You know you told me not to tell them, and of course I did not," she said simply, with the most absolute confidence that what he told her must be right.

"And do you always do and leave undone exactly what you are told?" asked

Dare incredulously, thinking how delightful such docility would be.

"O no!" said Kate, with her pretty dimpling laugh; "please don't get such a meek idea of me; I only do what I'm told when it happens to coincide with what I wish. Were your people very much surprised at your coming home so late?" she continued, a little hurriedly, rather embarrassed by the persistency with which his eyes dwelt upon her face.

"If they were," he said, with a rather grim smile, "they kept it to themselves. They know that I won't stand any catechism upon my goings and comings: it has cost me years of labour, but I have at length, I flatter myself, succeeded in impressing upon them the beauty and advisability of minding their own business."

"I wish you could give me your recipe," Kate said playfully; "I should like to apply it to uncle Piggott; though indeed," she added, a little compunctiously,

"I suppose he is right in thinking that minding my business is minding his own, as I am his ward."

"Well, he does not seem to exercise any very oppressive supervision over you," Dare said, leaning his elbow lazily down on the grass, and pulling the brim of his hat down over his great dark eyes.

"No," said Kate, and a rather distressed expression flitted over her tell-tale little face, "because he trusts me; and though he certainly is a very tiresome old person," she continued naively, "yet I'm sure he means well, and that's why I don't like the idea of doing anything double-faced or deceitful to him."

"Double-faced or deceitful!" repeated Dare impatiently; "that is straining at a gnat. Why, surely he does not expect you to account for every half-hour of your life to him! Why, a galley-slave's existence would be liberty itself compared to that!"

"Of course it would," she answered dubiously. "And yet," she went on, looking up with sudden, earnest, innocent eyes at his face, and clasping her pretty hands impulsively,— "and yet—please don't be angry with me, nor think my notions of duty very overstrained,—but if you would let me just mention this walk to them—"

"Nonsense!" said Dare roughly; "*of course* I won't!" and then seeing her face cloud with a look of surprised fear, he added more gently, but frowning heavily still, "my dear child, cannot you see that the truth is not always the best to be spoken? There are many things perfectly harmless to do, and yet better not to talk about. Kate, you are not willing, are you, to give up my society for the sake of a hypochondriacal old simpleton's prudish, antiquated code of propriety—for the obsolete prejudices of thirty years ago?"

Kate was silent.

"Speak to me," he said, his anger

merging into anxious tenderness, — “conventionality or me? which is it to be, Kate?”

“You,” she said, looking up quickly, and her eyes seemed to have caught some of the passion of his. And then she rose up, notwithstanding her alleged tiredness, and braving prosecution, went in amongst the standing corn, and took the trouble of plucking several wheat-ears and a whole handful of poppies. Laden with these, she came back, and sat down again. Then some girlish caprice prompted her to put a selection from the bunch of poppies and wheat-ears in amongst the plaits of her hair.

“Are not they lovely?” she asked, with a coquettish lowering of the eyelids.

He did not answer her.

“I suppose you don’t care for flowers,” she said, pouting. “Men never do.”

“Kate, I *do* care for them. Give me

one," he said, and his voice sounded harsh, as it always did when any strong emotion had got possession of its owner.

"Are you sure you'll behave well to it?" said Kate, half laughing, and making a feint of withholding it; "because if not—"

"Give it me," he said again, almost in a whisper. "Not one of those others; one of the very ones you have got in your hair: I *must* have it. No flower will ever be the same to me again. I'll keep it as long as I live—I swear I will; and it shall be buried in my grave with me, for the love of little Kate."

And he came nearer still, and put forth his hand, and took one of the coveted poppies out of its resting-place in her deep hair, and having got possession of it, kissed it madly, passionately—a piece of sentimentality that he would have been the first to sneer at in any other man. Kate sat passive, thrilled through every nerve, and

a very little alarmed at the storm she and her poppies had raised.

"You need not have taken it," she said, rather reproachfully, shrinking away a little from him; "I'd have given it you with pleasure. I like you to have it if it reminds you of me."

"Reminds me of you, indeed!" he said harshly, his eyes drinking deep at the fountain-head of intoxicating witchery contained for him in her simple eloquent face. "Much need to remind me of a person whose image keeps tormenting me day and night, sleeping and waking. If you would give me something to make me forget you for five minutes, it would be more to the purpose."

Kate looked down, and twisted a wheat-stalk round her small pink fingers.

"Why do you want to forget me?" she said shyly. "If anything pleasant has ever happened to me, I always wished to remember it."

"Because," he said gloomily, looking away from her over the gently-waving corn,—“because if I did what was right, I should never look in your face nor hear your sweet little voice again. Well, I have not been much in the habit of doing what was right from my youth up, and I don't see why I should begin now: there's a certain beauty in consistency, isn't there?” he ended, laughing ironically.

Kate left this question unanswered. Something in those reckless caverned eyes kept her dumb in a sort of tremulous expectancy, and they sat silent for a space; but it was as the hush of the elements before a storm; and as they sat, a light sound travelled to their ears, borne by the warning breeze, the evident undeniable sound of some people, a good way off still, but coming nearer every moment, talking in the next field—a small inoffensive sort of sound, not much louder than the buzzing of a summer gnat; but for all that it made

Dare and Kate start asunder, quite as effectually as if it had been a cannon-shot. Kate rose up swiftly, crimson as the heart of a many-folded rose, bathed in a flood of confusion.

"There's some one coming," she said, in a horrified whisper; visions of an incensed Daddy Piggott and a derisive Blount flashed before her guilty little soul.

"It's my sisters!" replied Dare, after a rapid glance at the disturbers of this harmless *tête-à-tête*, whispering unconsciously too. By no means pleased did he seem at the rencontre; in bitter wrath and vexation, on the contrary.

"Your sisters, is it?" said Kate, drawing a long breath of relief. "O I'm so glad. I thought it was uncle Piggott!"

"What on earth brings them here, of all places in the world?" he ground out, between his teeth. "Curse them!" And then he turned to Kate, and said rapidly, "Good-bye, Kate. You must go home by

yourself now. I shall have to walk home with *these women!*" And again he ground his teeth at the thought of them. "It seems abominable to ask you to do such a thing," he went on, while a dark flush of anger and shame crossed his face; "but *for my sake*, Kate, my own darling, get over the stile now, this minute, and run down the lane as quick as you can. It's for your own good, Kate. I would not have their prying eyes find you here with me now for any consideration. Good-bye, my darling—my own little Kate!" he added; "and remember what I asked you."

Kate involuntarily held up her head rather higher than usual.

"I am neither ashamed nor afraid to meet your sisters," she said proudly; "what business is it of theirs what I do or where I go? But of course," she added, her soft voice falling to a lower key, "if *you* think I had better go, I will."

"I *do* think so," he said earnestly, and glancing uneasily over his shoulder; "they are an ill-natured gossiping pair, though they are my sisters; and I don't want them to have the chance of tattling about you."

"Perhaps you are right," she said gravely; and having so said, she was not slow in obeying his injunctions. She sprang over the stile with remarkable agility. "Good-bye," she said, smiling, and nodding her graceful little head at him; "a pleasant walk to you;" and then she disappeared, and was out of sight in a moment.

Then Dare drew a deep breath, put his hands into his pockets, and lounged, lazy and *blasé*, to meet the advancing young ladies, as if nothing had or ever could have power to draw him out of his state of thorough indifference as regarded things in general. Was it fancy, or did the high-bred Annette and the polished Augusta look decidedly odd as he came up?

"Well, Dare, what have you been doing

with yourself all the afternoon?" asked Annette, with a rather constrained attempt at easiness of manner. "One does not often meet you ruralising."

"How can you ask what I have been doing?" said Dare, with reproachful language; "as if there was anything on earth or under the earth to do here. I have not been doing anything that I know of. I have been suffering a good deal. I have been conjugating the verb *s'ennuyer* in all its moods and tenses, as I do every afternoon, and indeed forenoon too, in this hole."

"I suppose you have been picking buttercups or making daisy chains now, have not you?" asked Augusta, with a sneer.

"Well, I have not yet, but I am fast coming to that stage. I feel I am," and he sighed deeply. "I'll give you the first I make, Gussy, I promise you, to wear in your hair. It'll look so charmingly girlish, you know."

Having paid Miss Augusta off with

that gentle blow aimed at her age, he felt better. Miss Augusta was a little exasperated. Exasperation and inquisitiveness together made her bolder than usual; for in ordinary cases, both she and Annette had a wholesome dread of their second brother, and had learned to abstain from questioning him as to his goings out and comings in. Augusta was naturally more valiant than her sister, so these combined causes made her spokeswoman now.

"I thought," she said, "that there was some one with you, some *woman*, when first we caught sight of you, Dare."

Not a trace of confusion on Dare's face as he took off his hat and passed his hand across his forehead, with an expression of utter boredom.

"Extremely probable," he said, without hesitation. "I met that little Williams's girl,—the red-faced one, you know,—and she kept on chattering to me till I really thought I never should get away from her."

I had to say at last that I saw my sisters coming, and I must go and meet them, or I should not have got rid of her by now."

Well lied, Dare, boldly and ingeniously. His sisters were staggered.

"Which way did she go?" asked Augusta, suspicious still.

"'Pon my honour, I don't know," drawled Dare, with a triumph of perplexity on his troubled features. "O, it must have been this way, I fancy, over the fields; but 'pon my honour I could not swear."

"Over the fields?" said Annette, interrogatively, with one foot on the stile in that direction.

"Ye-e-s, I think so," said Dare, doubtful still, and yawning. "O, you're going to rush off after her, are you? O, all right; but I don't think you'll overtake her, because she said she was in a devil of a hurry; no, I don't mean that, but she said she was in a tremendous hurry about something or other, and should run home

the whole way. I believe she intended me to run with her," he subjoined, with well-affected lazy conceit.

That remark was so much in Dare's style that his sisters were more staggered than ever. That one lie did more towards convincing or unconvincing them than all the former ones.

"What! is she a victim too?" asked Annette, laughing pleasantly.

"O, heaven forbid! I hope not!" said Dare fervently; "I cannot help it if she is," he added resignedly. They were walking very fast to overtake Miss Williams. "It's extremely hot work, posting along in the broiling sun at this rate," remarked Dare crossly; "I'm sure I wish to goodness you could get up to the girl, for I suppose your suspicions would be allayed then, and we might walk at a less heathenish rate. Yes," he went on, and he could not resist the temptation of dealing an ireful glare apiece to them—"I know you

think I have been telling you lies, as if I would take the trouble to tell lies to *you*;" and he put vast scorn into the "*you*."

"I'm sure I didn't suspect you," stammered Annette, convicted and repentant. "Did you, Augusta?"

"No-o," said Augusta reluctantly. "At least, I don't now."

So they gave over their chase, fairly burnt out by the baking sun, which made the delicately-nurtured Misses Stamer feel quite faint; and Dare subsided into a sulky silence, having lied with great success.

CHAPTER XI.

DARE went to London next day ; got into a carriage all by himself ; and smoked and pondered, pondered and smoked, all the way from Pen Dyllas to Euston. He had told Kate he was going, must go, on business, and I do believe he spoke the truth for once ; that he would have stayed if he could have managed it. Going away ! A death-knell ; but then only going away for a few days. Kate could live without him for a few days ; at least she must try. On the whole she was not very disconsolate, for he had said something at the same time that he told her of his intended absence which kept her spirits from flagging much.

“Only three days,” said Kate next morning, standing before the glass, smiling at

herself; plaiting away with deft white fingers at the hair on one side of her head, while at the other side it fell unattacked as yet; billowy, like the hair of one of Guido's ravishing Magdalens over her white dressing-gown. "Dear me! How late I am! The result of my headache, of course." Then Kate looked out of the window, and reflected that, after all, perhaps Dare's going away was rather a good thing of the two. It was a pouring wet day, and they could not well have strolled out together under an umbrella, and moreover she could not, for very shame, have got up another headache again so soon, after never having had one in her life before. She smiled at herself again then. "Well, I don't look much like one with a headache to-day, certainly," she said half aloud. O no, no, she should never have anything more to say to headache, or heartache either, after what passed yesterday. A warm blush which only herself and the glass had the benefit of.

“We’ll always have a bed of poppies in our garden, Dare and I will. I never cared much about them before, because they had no smell ; but now, I don’t think there’s any flower in the world to be compared to them.” Ready at last ; and Kate ran down to breakfast, singing as she went, about the most thoroughly contented individual then breathing in Pen Dyllas. “Good-morning, everybody!” said she, giving a glad little nod to the company generally ; “and I beg everybody’s pardon for being so late ; but it really was not my fault. I could not help it ; everything went crooked with me to-day. I hope it is not a bad sign.”

“Well, my little maid,” inquired Mr. Piggott, with very unnecessary solicitude, “and how is your head this morning?—pretty well, I hope, my love. I got dear Ma to mix you one of those nice saline draughts that I take sometimes, when I have one of my bad headaches, and I was just going to send her up with it to your

room, my dear love, when Maggie told us you were taking a little nap ; so I told dear Ma that I thought we had better leave you quite quiet for a little bit, instead ?”

“ O, it’s all right now, thank you, Mr. Piggott,” said Kate, a little ashamed, and resolving she would never tell the headache lie again.

“ I don’t remember that you ever used to complain of headache until lately, my dear love,” continued Mr. Piggott, musing. “ I think you must be taking after your old uncle, must not she, dear Ma ?”

“ Holy St. Bridget, I hope not,” said Kate devoutly, startled at this new resemblance ; “ at least,” she said, perceiving her own incivility, “ I mean about headaches, of course.”

But Mr. Piggott was revelling in the vision of his own many and great ailments, and her caution was unnecessary. How the rain did patter down outside, to be sure ! —not coming down in slant intermittent

bursts, wind driven, but falling steadily straight down from heaven to earth, as if bent on fulfilling its mission, and soaking the ground as quickly and thoroughly as possible. It washed every one of the broad leaves on the sombre dust-whitened trees; so that they shone polished, making them "reassume the forms of their earlier" leafhood. It washed the faces of the houses too; but they did not like it; they looked very gloomy and sulky under the operation. As for the sea, she had a coy fit, and had put on her very thickest veil, so that it was impossible to get a glimpse of her features through it, even when you stood quite close to her. Splash, splash, splash, went a few people, umbrella'd and clogged, along the sloppy pavement. The chickens puffed out their feathers as much as ever they could, turned up their coat-collars as it were, and stood morose and shivering in acrobatic attitudes, supporting themselves on one leg, under such shelter as they could obtain.

The ducks, on the contrary, thought it good sport, and found even more delicious tid-bits than usual in the gutter. What a deplorable thing a wet day at the sea-side is, to be sure! Kate thought so, as she stood, after breakfast, drumming with her fingers on the dim window, and watching the progress of a drop down the pane with as much interest as ever Bruce watched his spider with. Then Margaret spoke. "I would not say so before *them*," she began, in rather a low voice, shaking her head in the direction of the room where Daddy Piggott had retired, with the "one lone spirit" that was his minister, ostensibly to write business letters, but in reality to have a good comfortable "bleat" about giddiness and vertigo and general debility—"I would not say so before them, of course, but I have had what I consider uncommonly good news to-day. I think you'll think so too, Blount. I don't think you will, Kate."

"Well, what is it?" asked Blount, from

the easy-chair where he sat with his legs dangling over the arm. "Make haste and tell us ; don't keep us on the rack of expectation—it's worse than St. Lawrence's gridiron ; it is, indeed. I would not mind betting that it is some ridiculous nonsense I shall not care a straw about ; *nascitur ridiculus mus*,—if you know what that means."

Kate turned from the window to hear.

"Why," pursued Margaret, "it's just this : that I have had a letter from that man about our new house, and he says his present tenants are leaving sooner than he expected, and that we can have it any day we like now—the earlier the better."

"Hallelujah! Hallelujee!" said Blount, jumping up, and upsetting the chair. "That is something better worth hearing than I expected. Let's leave to-morrow by the first train, by all means."

"No, that's absurd, of course," answered Maggie meditatively, biting the top of her

crochet-needle ; "but I don't see why we should not get away next Monday. I am so sick of this place. It was only this morning I was reflecting how awful it was to think that we should have three more Sundays here yet."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Kate, with irrepressible vexation, biting her lips hard. "I cannot understand why you hate this place so. I don't know what you want, I'm sure."

"Want!" repeated Blount, taking on himself the office of explainer; "why, we want a place where there's something to do or something to see. Why, what is there here? There's no boating, no billiards, no nothing."

"You see," resumed Margaret, taking up the thread where Blount's eloquence had come to an end. "It may be all very pleasant for you, Kate, but it's not particularly lively for Blount and me looking on. You know you need not come if you

don't like, nobody wants you ; but, indeed, my poor child," she went on with compassionate significancy, "even if you do stay I'm afraid it will be useless. I am indeed."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Blount, with surprised contemptuous amusement, "that the reason why she wants to stay so much is to try and get that big, conceited, black fellow to smile upon her again? O, ye gods and little fishes! that I should live to see this day!"

Blount's withering scorn had the effect of silencing Kate's objections and Kate altogether. Bitterly antagonistic to this plan as she was, yet she could not face ridicule on that theme. It made her wince so absurdly. And intensely annoyed and resistant as she was, she turned back to the contemplation of the streaming pane, and listened impotently, angry, and grieved, to Margaret and Blount laying their plans with much mutual satisfaction and accord ; while her younger sister's portion

of being slaughtered Juggernaut-wise under her elder's chariot-wheels tasted in her mouth as unsavoury as dust and ashes. The weather outside looked more drab and dirt-coloured than ever now; the houses more damp and lachrymose; the chickens more humped up; even the ducks quacked and waddled less jubilantly. Poor Kate! there were several people in Pen Dyllas more contented than you now. She had not the consolation of resolving to tell Dare her troubles and have them vanish under his sympathy, his deep-voiced "Poor little child,"—for was not Dare gone steaming up to London, every minute further and further away from her? One thought still had power to comfort—the thought of that something which Dare had said to her, and thereby made her feel his absence a trivial grievance. This "something" was merely this. Colonel Stamer had told her that his sisters intended giving a school-feast—"a tea-fight or some such violent form of

dissipation," Dare phrased it,—a few days hence—the very day of his intended return, in fact—and that he had heard them say that they intended asking the Chesters to this mild entertainment.

"*Do* come; you must, for my sake," Dare had urged. "It's horribly dull I know, and I know too that you hate my sisters—and I'm sure I don't wonder at it; in fact, I'm not at all certain that I don't agree with you; but we'll try and entertain one another, won't we, Kate, and not trouble them much? Promise you'll come, now; just promise for my sake, Kate, for my sake!"

So Kate's mental eyes were fixed now on this tea-fight as earnestly (I don't suppose they could have been more so) as any of the Welsh urchins who purposed within their gluttonous little souls to lay in, on that auspicious occasion, such a stock of buns and weak tea as would serve them for the ensuing blank twelvemonth. Who

knew what might happen on that day? What delicious continuation of the field scene? Something might by possibility occur which would make it indifferent to her whether she went from Pen Dyllas or stayed there.

CHAPTER XII.

So the slow days went lagging by, only two whole ones, and they were as two years. When one thinks one is most utterly miserable and forlorn, one is, I think, often not in one's worst estate. There are tears that are better than much laughing. There is a joy that is worse than many tears. At several subsequent periods of her short history, Kate thought herself immeasurably worse off than at this epoch; but, to my thinking, never was she in more completely evil case than under the blaze of these long-tarrying June noons. She had made her selection for ever it seemed—had chosen her home in this great lazar-house of ours—

“Here, where men sit and hear each other groan”—

had taken for her bosom friends those plague-stricken and earth-spotted ones like herself. All the good that had ever been in her, all the pith and marrow of her soul's being, seemed to have been scorched away, to have been shrivelled up "like a parched scroll." How impossible it was to her now to lift up her sick heavy soul from below to above, from the low, smoky, toiling valleys near at hand, to the calm, blue, distant hills! It would not be dragged up; it did not want to be. Like a log it fell back to earth again, and lay all along among the smoke and the dirt, and the weary din, and revelled in them. "The world's accursed trinity," as Leighton grandly calls them, pinned it to earth and tied down its wings. Kate knelt down, indeed, as usual at exactly the same time every morning and evening, and mumbled a few words to God with her lips, and a good many to Dare with her heart. She knelt down because she had always so

knelt down from a child, because it was as invariable a part of her toilet as brushing her hair or putting on her dress. But how could she practise such flagrant, foul hypocrisy as to pretend to ask for those heavenly gifts which seemed to her so savourless and insipid, so little worth the having when won? Savourless and insipid indeed! O, unreckoning fool! She guessed not that those gifts were of so delicate and rare a flavour that to those who have once tasted of them, all the heaped up high-seasoned dainties of earth seem rank and nauseous in comparison. How could she blaspheme God by craving from Him that one earthly boon which was the sole thing, under the sky or above it either, that seemed to her worth the taking? One face and one form which (wait but a few years at the most) would be resolved into its primal dust; would have to trust to its coffin-plate for the poor satisfaction of being distinguished from the other dust around it; this

one face and form, evanescent as the cloud-faces one sees in dreams, filled up so completely the gazing space of her soul's eyes, as to leave no room for the smallest glimpse, the faintest vision of the adamant walls and towers and joy-giving gates of "Jerusalem the golden." One voice, whose tones (let but a few summers roll by) would be as unalterably dumb as the sand-whelmed Sphinx; as forgotten as the sound of last year's showers; this one voice surged and rung in her ears so that not to them could come the weakest echo of

"The shout of them that triumph; the song of them
that feast."

She could never think of her dead mother now. When her thoughts wandered off to that happy woman, she called them back again, shuddering; they dare not pursue her into the inner courts of

"Zion David, urbs tranquilla."

Formerly, how often, how very often she

had gone to her in thought ; had talked to her, with the drear one-sided conversation one can hold with the dead ! How she used to cry at her prayers ! tears that, with all their bitter softness, had a dash of uncloying sweetness too ; knowing keenly, with bare chilling certainty, that this little darling mother had gone beyond the province of the eye, or the ear, or the touch, to join that great host that every minute swells of the departed ones. They had been as the two women grinding at the mill : the one had been taken, the other had been left. How many times, in the past days, Kate had pictured to herself after what fashion they would meet !—with what greeting, not of earth's framing, when the King's messenger should have come across the flood to fetch her too, as he came to fetch Christian, and Hopeful, and Mercy, and Much Afraid. Yes, she should see her again ; not pale, indeed, and thin, and pain-racked, and patient any longer (for patience implies the

existence of suffering); but, for all that, the very same mother, and not another, who had taught her her letters, and scolded her, and talked to her, and taken such an interest in her as no one had ever done since; that same mother whom she had nursed and been often disrespectful to, and loved utterly, and lost! These last weeks seemed to have borne Kate many, many miles farther away from that pure saint. Her image, when it visited her now, had a mute reproach in its spirit eyes. It did not come often; Kate would not let it, it tortured her. She had exchanged her dead mother for living Dare it seemed, and she clasped her bargain to her heart, and repented not of it. As for Dare, he had taken a resolution, and was in such an amiable humour as he had not been seen in for exactly a year and a half.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOWEVER much the days lag, they do go by ; they are not stationary, they are ever on the move ; so now they had brought round the day of the Misses Stamer's school-feast, "their nonsensical tea-fight," as their admiring brother had styled it. And the clocks had ticked round all through the morning and the noon, and had ticked on into the lazy, do-nothing afternoon. The earth had recovered her temper, and after her peevish tears was laughing again broadly, and the sea had taken off her veil, and thrown it away, and was coquetting with the sky as boldly and openly as ever.

"Good-bye, Daddy Piggott," said Kate, coming armed *cap-à-pie*, for the day's encounter, into the room where her uncle

was leaning back in an elbow-chair, flabby, amiable, and suffering as usual. "I hope your head will be pretty comfortable when we come back." She was so running over with general benevolence and *bonhomie*, that she must vent it on some one, and old Daddy Piggott was the nearest at hand.

"Thank you, my love," he said slowly, with the smile of a fat martyr, "but I am afraid there is not much chance of that."

"O, I hope so," replied Kate, unfeelingly cheerful, in a fever to be off. "Had not we better be going now, Maggie?"

"Now, my dear loves," interposed Mr. Piggott, rising up in his chair, in the interest of the moment, "there's one thing I must beg of you, and that is that you will be very careful not to be sitting in wet feet. I hope you have all got strong boots on, my loves. Now, my little maid," he cried, detecting Kate in a natty little pair, which certainly did not come under the head of hobnails, "I see that yours are

not at all fit for walking; indeed, my love, I must insist on your putting on a pair of galoches; if you have not got a pair dear Ma will lend you hers with pleasure, I'm sure; will you not, dear Ma?"

"O, thank you, Mr. Piggott, I'm very much obliged," said Kate, turning up her small nose behind his back even more than nature had done it for her, at the idea of incasing her dainty little feet in aunt Harriet's coalboxes.

"Ask him to lend you his," said Blount, *sotto voce*. "I know he has got some," and he exploded in untimely mirth.

"Wait one moment, dear loves," said Mr. Piggott's voice again, lifted up in mild detention. "There's one other thing I want to warn you all against, and that is against sitting down on the damp grass. You know, my dear loves, that it must be so very wet after all the rain we have had, and indeed it is always very dangerous sitting out on the grass. Do you remember

what a terrible cold I got, dear Ma, after I had been sitting out on the grass one day, many years ago now?"

"O, I'll promise not to sit down anywhere at all, nor let the others either," cried Kate impatiently; and having made this rash vow she went.

How pleasant after the dusty Aber Fynach road looked the dappled lawns, spreading out, carpet-wise, at the feet of that before-mentioned pinchbeck structure, Llyn Castle—that prince of shams! How cool the grass looked, shivering, rippling, shimmering in the little gentle breeze; bright light green in the sun, dark green under the sombre, shady trees, that spread their shelter so wide. They sheltered unwonted objects this afternoon—objects which the cows surveyed suspiciously from afar, and imagined first to be placed there with some reference to themselves. These objects were long tables and benches laid out after the usual fashion of tea-fights.

Down their centre went, with a certain monotony which fatigued the fancy, piled-up dishes of buns, currant-bread, bread-and-butter—buns, currant-bread, bread-and-butter—buns. But amply equal to compensate this monotony was the infinite variety of the army of mugs which flanked this social board; a heterogeneous assembly, of which not one was like his brother; presents and tokens and keepsakes from every place under the sun, at least the sun of Wales. On these benches, in fruition of this banquet, were deposited in erect postures the bodies of the owners of these mugs, a company of small Welsh Christians, male and female, realising the last week's dream, eating acres of bread and scrape, and cuneiform portions of cake—

"Greasing their fistisses,
Up to their wristisses."

Twice blessed were these young people, for what they ate they ate twice—once with their round eyes, once with their unintel-

ligent Welsh mouths. And reversing the order of society, ministering to the wants of these beatified little boors, keeping up the supply of acres of bread-and-butter, and cuneiform portions of cake, moved several young ladies, gliding and flitting about, all grace and white muslin and activity, reminding one of the houris that will bring good Moslems their sherbet and light their chibouques for them in their high-souled, intellectual paradise. *There* were the Misses Stamer, condescending, shady-hatted *passées*; *there* were also two dear friends they had staying with them; and there were Margaret and Kate Chester, neither condescending nor *passées*, fresh and active and good-natured, running about with decoctions of the feeblest of feeble tea out of the big urns, and asking *gorged* little boys whether they did not think they could manage one bit more. But there is a limit to even school-children's capacity. Wait but patiently enough and you'll bring

them to acknowledge it in time. The Aber Fynach children were no exception to this rule, they had to cry "Hold, enough!" at last; and then, urged on and incited thereto by a crinolined government schoolmistress, and a lank-haired government schoolmaster, they stood up, laid their dirty little hands together, and, after the fashion of school-children, burst forthwith, uncomfortably soon after tea as it was, into song. They set up (not quite simultaneously) what was, I must say, if I pay any regard to truth, a dreadful hymn. By which I don't mean to say anything against the hymn itself, which was, I daresay, a very pretty well-composed hymn; but what I allude to was the manner in which it was conveyed by about fifty squeaky little voices, nobly regardless of time and tune. Six staves it had; six several times it rose and fell, but the tortured air had peace at last, and it died away for good. And all this while Dare Stamer lay on the grass, a little

way off, doing nothing, in lazy luxuriance, watching the active, summer-robed maidens; watching *one* rather from under the eaves of his hat—the youngest and smallest of all the maidens, as she passed hither and thither, freighted with buns and steaming mugs, taking, sometimes, cautious arrow-swift peeps in his direction.

Much as Dare looked down upon his sisters, and thoroughly good order as he kept them in, he was in reality profoundly afraid of them now—afraid of Augusta's sharp eyes; so he gave them no occasion against him, as he lay there, paying no attention to any woman under the sun, having given no sign that he was aware of Kate's presence beyond a formal shake of the hand and a brace of languid remarks about the weather. But this neglect did not pain her, as the former one had done, for his eyes were upon her, and his eyes were to her as the sun is to the earth. Their warmth stirred her up to be so busy

and laudably benevolent; perhaps if he had been away she might have been idle and slack-handed; but I do not know. I may do her injustice in that. Her thick white-muslin frock was as common and plain as a frock could be, and had been washed ever so many times; but, for all that, how close it sat, without a crease, to that well-sculptured form, how clearly it defined the outline of that fairy bust! And the sun kissed her hair, and her soft throat, and her hands—kissed away as if he never could be sated, and made Dare quite jealous. He would be a lucky Moslem that should have his sherbet brought him by such a houri. The hymn came to an end, I have said; the last nasal hallelujah became the property of the past, and it was intimated to Cambria's sons and daughters by the crinolined government schoolmistress and the lank-haired government schoolmaster that they were at liberty to disport themselves as seemed good in

their eyes. So now they were scattered all over the pleasant lawns and meadows, playing with a business-like vigour, which excited the marvel of those elders who had seen them feed, and roused envy of their digestive powers.

"I should think we had done our duty now," said Miss Stamer to the company generally. "I suppose we may leave the little wretches to their own devices. I'm sure another of those verses would have killed me outright."

"Let's walk down to the fernery," suggested Augusta; "I want to show Florence my new bit of *cristata* : it will make her so envious. Will you come, Miss Chester?"

So they sauntered away, sweeping, trailing-robed, over the grass and the buttercups. They went down the hill ; but Kate did not accompany them,—*dis aliter visum*,—and the choice morsel of *cristata* remained unseen by her till the day of its death, or hers, for I don't know which *came first*.

She had risen reluctantly from the bench, where she sat fanning herself with an improvised fan of horse-chestnut leaves after her exertions, and prepared, with a very ill grace, to follow—for what shred of an excuse had she for staying behind? But that was not Dare's intention; his turn had come now. He leapt up from his comfortable lounging-place, came quickly towards her, and said, in an eager whisper:

"Stop here; don't go off with those women. I want you to come to the conservatory with me instead. Only wait till they're round the corner out of sight. You'll come, Kate, won't you?"

Kate nodded her head.

"Yes, I'll come," she said; and she sat down contentedly again, and fanned herself with fresh vigour.

"There, they're gone now," said Dare, drawing a long breath of pleasure as the last petticoat disappeared round a bend in

the drive. "And now let's have a look at you after all these days."

And he did take one of those long, unshackled looks he loved; his eyes, after their three days' fast, were ravenous, and feasted now royally. Kate stood before him, as good and docile a little creature as could be seen, with her hands folded, and her eyelashes caressing her cheek—on approval, like a Circassian slave at the market of Constantinople.

"Will that do?" she said at last, looking up inquiringly, with a laugh.

And it would have been insulting to those features then to say that that erring, *retroussé* nose, and that briefest of brief upper lips were piquant—they were piquancy's self.

"Not near," replied Dare's low voice, with strong emphasis.

"Well, then, it must," rejoined Kate, laughing again, provokingly and provocatively. "You are unreasonable;" and a

devil of coquetry entered into her, and she half covered her face with the broad horse-chestnut fan. "I thought we were going to the conservatory," said she, peeping between the leaves at her companion.

"All in good time," said Dare coolly, becoming master of the fan, and tossing it to the winds of heaven. "But before we go you'll be kind enough to put on your hat, won't you? or you'll be burnt all manner of colours," he added, affecting airs of ownership which felt uncommonly pleasant.

His Circassian must not have her white skin tanned.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Kate rebelliously. "I don't care if I'm burnt as black as a coal!"

"I should like to see you then," said Dare; and his lips curved into one of his gleaming laughs. "What a dear little negro you would make! But come," said he, not accustomed to have his will run coun-

ter to, fully intending to be obeyed this time, "put on your hat, there's a good child;" and he picked it up off the grass.

"*No, I will not,*" replied Kate, with great distinctness of utterance, setting her small teeth firmly, impelled thereto still by the demon of coquetry; and she smiled, defiant and saucy, and pushed away her ill-used head-gear.

"You wicked little thing!" said Dare, vexed and bewitched. "I do believe the very fact of asking a woman to do a thing makes her resolute against it."

"If I may not tan my own complexion, whose may I?" she said gaily, and so saying she lifted up her happy, beautiful eyes to his, and he, looking down into them, lost himself in their light, as we "lose the lark in heaven."

CHAPTER XIV.

Off they strolled then, as slowly as two people with the right complement of legs apiece could stroll, in the direction of the conservatory; and as it was not much more than a hundred paces off, even they got there before long. And how marvelously pleasant it was when they were fairly inside that "box where sweets compacted lie;" how almost oppressive, overpowering, the fragrance of the warm damp atmosphere, where a thousand sweet smells strove perpetually for the mastery! There, side by side, gathered from the far east and the far west, blossomed and reigned Nature's most regal flower-daughters. Gorgeous, stately flowers, that had hitherto revealed their passionate hearts, fold after fold, to the fainting air of some cloudless,

rainless, brazen tropic sky, now poured forth all their sweets, put on all their brilliant apparel, under our watery, sickly sunbeams. There great dark leaves, moss-green, rose-veined, drooped heavy with their own weight; there crimsons and scarlets burned and flamed, imperial, with a depth and intensity of colour which our dear, pale-faced northern flowers never dreamed of putting on. What of man's devising can be more intoxicating than one of these temples dedicated to rich odours and brave tints? And when there stands in this temple, among these gorgeous flowers, a lovely woman—lovely, with the ripe womanly development of one of Titian's Venuses, not with the emaciated prettiness of modern young ladies—the subjugation of the senses may be supposed to be complete. Kate was in ecstasies. She ran hither and thither, smelling first one, and then another.

“Delicious!” she cried, “wonderful! I

wish I was gardener here. Flowers are one of the very few weak points in my character. O, O!"

The wealth of enjoyment there was in that last "O!" beggars description.

"Well, you certainly are an adept at smelling," called out Dare at last, from the comfortable position he had taken up on a rustic seat with wooden legs, very ingeniously contorted in a sort of elephantiasis. "There, you've gone the round of them all now about seven times. Do come and sit down here; I want to talk to you."

Kate worshipped at the shrine of one more gardenia, and then came and filled the situation indicated.

Dare rested his arm on the much-twisted wooden back behind her, and prepared for a comfortable chat.

"You have not told me yet," he began, sinking his voice to that low soft key which made tender things sound so infinitely more tender,—“you have not told me yet how

much you have missed me these last few days."

Kate, very rudely, took no notice of this question. She was much interested in drawing an ingenious design on the pavement, with the point of one of the afore-mentioned natty little boots. Let us hope she did not hear it. At last the silence became rather a weight to her, so she raised herself up, and asked with great irrelevancy:

"Where's the rose you said you wanted to show me?"

"O, hang the rose!" replied Dare, laughing; "there is not one that I know of; but come, Kate, you have not answered my question yet. How much did you miss me? Very badly, or rather badly, or only a little? I know you did miss me a little," he added confidently, smoothing down, with big, leisurely fingers, the great silky-brown moustache which was the one beauty of his ugly face. "So come, confess it,

there's a good child. You know it is horribly wicked to tell stories. You'll go to some awfully bad place if you do."

"Well, it *was* rather dull," owned Kate reluctantly, dropping the words out very slowly, one after another, as if they were forced out of her; "but O," she went on, more quickly, looking up, as a remembrance of her woes flashed back upon her, "I've got such bad news to tell you—something that happened since you went away."

"I suppose that valuable dog of yours has broken his leg or tumbled into a fit," suggested Dare, with the same condescending sort of petting pity one might express towards a child whose doll had begun to bleed sawdust.

"No; worse than that," replied Kate, shaking a sage Lord-Burleigh head. "O, you'd never guess; it is that we are going away on Monday next, instead of when I told you;" and she added another stroke or two to the device on the pavement.

"Going away!" said Dare, without a grain of the anticipated dismay in his tones, in a voice *so* cool—the eldest son of indifference—that Kate looked up, astonished and staggered, to see whether his face did not give the lie to his ice-cold words. But no; he did not look a bit vexed; he was smiling; a smile not only executed by the lips, but consented to and shared in by all the harsh dark features.

"And I'm sure we shall never come back again," pursued Kate, bitterly disappointed, but still nourishing a faint hope that he had not taken in the meaning of her words. ("He must be strangely altered, if that does not move him," she thought.)

"*Indeed!*" answered Dare, with polite interest; calmly as he might have heard of the going away of Daddy Piggott; and the smile still hovered over the swart face and brightened it.

Kate could not dissimulate what she felt, even to save her life.

"I'm sure I don't know why I told it you as bad news to you, or to anyone else either. I told stories; it is not bad news;" and she turned her face away pettishly; leaving only for Colonel Stamer's consideration a very neat parting down the back of her head, and much furzy hair.

"And you don't know any of the people we know, and you never go up to town," said Dare, with a fund of unrestrained amusement, and a much greater fund of restrained something else in his voice; "so I don't suppose we shall ever meet again."

"Certainly not, I should say," answered Kate with tragic solemnity; very firm and distinct at the "certainly;" very shaky and weak at the "say."

"Well, then, Kate," said Dare, liking to prolong his pleasure, and watching her as a cat does a mouse, "I suppose we may consider our acquaintance as come to an end, mayn't we?" and the bad, bold eyes read off her poor tell-tale face like a book.

Where were all the short-lived little coquetries now?

"I suppose so," answered Kate, and she lifted the green eyes to his cruel face, and they shone through two big tears, clear and pellucid as ocean water over yellow sand on a shining day.

Kate did not look pretty when she cried, any more than any other woman under the sun; her nose got red and her eyelids swelled like any other young lady's; but she was not crying now. Those tears were never shed, and had no successors.

Dare set his teeth hard for a minute, and drew in his breath determinately, keeping shut the sluice-gates of the great flood that was surging, boiling, raging within him, which he would have to give in to soon. Not yet, not yet! One moment more.

"No more walks, Kate," said the mellow voice, when at length its owner could persuade it to speak at all; and it sounded to Kate as utterly sad as the knell that goes

toll, toll, from the church close by, when the funeral is winding slow and black up the hill.

"No more," replied Kate, choked; and it seemed impossible but that those two tears must have many successors.

"I shall have to stroll about with my sisters, sha'n't I, Kate? Won't it be dull? And who'll you walk with?" asked Dare tormentingly, feeling that he could not go on in this strain much longer.

"Nobody!" answered Kate, nearly broken-hearted at the turn things had taken; so different from what she had pictured them.

"Nobody!" repeated Dare: "poor little lonely Kate!"

It was no use talking—she could not bear it any longer; the compassion of that rich falling cadenced voice stabbed her; he was *pitying* her for loving him so much. She got up hastily, intending to rush off blindly somewhere; it did not matter where. What did she care if she did meet all those women, and they knew all about her?

"Stop, Kate," said Dare, then catching hold of her by the hand; and the change in his tones made her cease her agonising pleadings.

"Let me go—let me go!"

The flood was rising up now in him—higher, higher—taking giant steps; fiercer than ever it surged and boiled; he *could* not stand against it any longer. It was stronger than he. Devils are mightier than men. What good wasting one's strength wrestling with them? He gave in.

"Don't you think, Kate," he said—and the mounting flood made his voice very husky—"that as we are going to part so soon we had better say good-bye now?"

"Yes," answered Kate, standing there captive, dazed, and not knowing exactly what she said.

"And how do friends bid each other good-bye, Kate?" asked Dare again.

He could not speak above a deep whisper now, and the light he had been keeping out

of his eyes with such difficulty blazed full in them ; lurid, like a watchfire on a dark night.

"I don't know," said Kate mistily, with the shade of something that was coming dim on her soul.

"Is it this way, Kate?" came the low whisper, shaken and hurried ; and off went the last rag of restraint, and he wrapped his arms around her as she stood before him, tighter, tighter, and bent down his head from its stately height to her small uplifted face, nearer, nearer, till their lips met, and were joined in a wedlock so fast, so long enduring, so firm, that it seemed as if they never could be divorced again. Such a kiss as the one that Fatima spake of—

"Once he drew
In one long kiss my whole soul through
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew."

Silence, except that the flowers rustled their leaves, and waved their bright heads sympathetically. They had seen something

of that kind before, when they lived in the tropics. At last Dare spoke, husky-voiced yet, holding his prize still in her iron bondage, as if he never intended to loose her out of that strong prison again.

"Kate, do you love me? I don't know why I ask; I know you do; but I like to hear you say so."

"Yes," replied Kate, almost inaudibly, drunk with a sense of her own bliss.

"Say, yes, Dare," urged he again; for having now succumbed for good, he felt as if he never could have enough of clasping her there to himself.

"Yes, Dare," replied she obediently; more inaudibly than ever.

"Much or little, Kate?" asked he again, with hoarse-toned, exacting fervour.

"Much," said Kate briefly.

"How much?" asked he, thirsting to have her own voice make her altogether his for ever and ever.

Kate being thus catechised, took courage.

"O, why do you ask me?" she said, and she gazed right up in those wells of liquid fire, his eyes, and was not a bit terrified of them now. "Why, I love you better than anything or anybody in this or any other world: better, O, much better, than my own soul; so well that I am quite frightened at myself sometimes;" and a shadow fell on the rapt green eyes.

"Darling!" whispered Dare, satisfied at last; and indeed it would have been very odd if he had not been. "And how much do you suppose I love you, Kate?"

"I don't know," said Kate, having subsided into shyness, after making her declaration.

"So much," said he, with condensed passion, and the heavy brows drew together in the intensity of his emotion, "that I'd cut your dear little soft throat here, this very minute, if I thought any other man would ever kiss you again as I have done to-day."

I've done. I'm tired of writing about love-making. When two people have climbed up to the extremest pinnacle of insane bliss, it is best to leave them alone there. They come tumbling down quick enough, without any one's help; and so there I leave Dare and Kate.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY morning, in June, by the sea-side. Rest for the bathing-machines ; rest for the abominably overworked rickety-legged riding horses ; rest for the numberless donkeys ; rest for the wooden spades ; rest for everything and everybody. Sunday morning, with that peculiar peacefulness, that freedom from bustle and turmoil which our fancy is apt to impute to every object in earth and sea and sky on that one day. A peacefulness which is merely and entirely the daughter of our own imaginations ; prone to project their feelings and sensations on all inanimate objects around them, which has no foundation in reality. It is a very pardonable freak of the imagination, I think, on such a Sunday as the one I am going to

talk about. The sky seemed to rise higher, clearer, bluer than its wont ; making one vast cathedral of the one universal catholic faith for men to fall down and worship their God in ; that great dome which those mighty forefathers of ours, the Normans, with a noble spirit of imitation, tried to copy in those round arches of theirs, which still stand, in their solid stateliness, monuments of their veneration and their zeal. The sea, too, had put on its Sunday garb of quiet ; it had laid aside all its smiles, its dimples, and its sparkles, all the weapons of its coquetry, and exchanged them for a most sweet gravity. There it lay, smooth and waveless, as a stagnant inland pool. But there was nothing of stagnation in this gravity. Rather it seemed as if the ocean was looking up in solemn contemplation to the heavens,

“Held in holy quiet, still.”

She had fallen into a nun-like, St.-Agnes sort of humour, which suited her marvel-

lously well. It is near church-time, and the bells are giving out their voices—those bell-tones which seemed so passing merry and jocund to some, so unutterably sad to others; the church's full chimes, and the Wesleyan's one shrill tinkle mingling amicably together. And the road up to Aber Fynach,—that road which is always so cool and refreshing in summer, so shady and windless on winter days; that road where the ivy hangs great dark-green nosegays over the wall to the passers-by,—how much more thronged than usual it is! Along it all Pen Dyllas is streaming saunteringly in their Sunday best. Comfortable fathers and mothers of families, broad-backed, well-to-do, who have been getting fat in each other's society for the last twenty or thirty years; young men in lavender gloves and infinitesimal prayer-books; young women in crisp well-starched Sunday dresses, and parasols that rival the hues of the prism; each group chattering

away about the trifles which were of such interest to it, and such caviare to all the others. And all the chatting and laughing went on, unconsciously, in a more subdued key than on other days; for is not it Sunday, and are not we going to church?

“On to God’s house the people press’d,
Passing the place where all must rest;
Each enter’d like a welcome guest.”

The bells have ceased their calling and inviting now; for the feast is ready, and the guests are set; the dissenting tinkle has the field all to itself. The stream of people has flowed inside the gray weather-beaten walls, and made a many-coloured pool there, all but a few hopelessly belated ones who come in, puffing and panting, towards the second lesson. And the chants rise and fall in mellow cadences; the voices of the choir distinct and separate each from the other, but well blended,—for, for a wonder, it is a good choir,—resting on, as it were, and supported by the organ’s “monotonous

undertone." And the psalms, the sweet singer's glad verses, swell out jubilant; and now we have got to the litany, and everybody has gone down on their knees, and is burying their head in their pocket-handkerchief, or their coat-sleeve, according to the sex, and finding it very hot and exceedingly uncomfortable. The grand simple words go up to heaven reverently as they do every Sunday—"In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us." Solemnest of all the solemn petitions the Church offers to her Spouse! I wonder to how many those words were as husks and chaff, to how many the very pith and marrow of their soul's being. The parson has put on his black gown now, and is gone up into his pulpit, and all the congregation try to settle themselves in positions as little torturing as the over-full pews and the hard seats and the June sun will let them. Kate Chester's green eyes are fixed upon the

ceiling as if in rapt attention, as she sits there close to the door, on a humble bench between Margaret, pink-bonneted, wakeful, on the one side, and Blount, tawny-haired, drowsy, on the other. The good man, after St. Paul's pattern, "reproves, rebukes, exhorts; reasons of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;" tells loathingly of the dross, and the filth, and the weary hollowness of this earth's joys, of that death into whose jaws we fall, hundreds of us, every hour that beats; points lovingly upward; beseeches all with eager zeal to set their feet on the lowest rung of that steep ladder that scales the sky.

"A beautiful sermon," everybody said; and Kate sat entranced, with rapt green eyes, and did not hear one word of it. She was saying over again all that wonderful dialogue that was spoken yesterday among the flowers, when lips did more and better than speak; was inventing a yet more

entrancing dialogue for to-night; was wondering whether that was Dare's or Guy's coat-sleeve which she saw up the vista of the long aisle, resting easefully on the door of the Stammers' big pew. Only twenty, and all her troubles over already. What a lie to say that the course of true love never ran smooth! A whole lifetime with Dare before her, sixty years perhaps, or at all events fifty; and what an immense time fifty years was! Why, old Daddy Piggott was only fifty. And they'd be buried together, when they died, in the Stamer vault, so close that in a few years people could not distinguish the dust of one from the dust of the other. And one monument should be put up to them both, somewhere amongst those frightful cenotaphs and hatchments that are looking down now, grim, on the party of live Stammers below. The inscription should be in English, that everybody might know how Dare Stamer and his wife Catherine Stamer departed this

life on the same day, and now lie buried underneath this chancel. Kate had not quite satisfied herself with the wording of this inscription, when she was conscious that the sermon had come to an end, by everybody rising. And the benediction has fallen soft on the ear, and all are flowing out again into the cool churchyard. Kate lingers in God's Acre, as the Germans call it, where the grasses are waving and swaying as joyfully in the June breeze as they could in a less serious place, where each green mound and small inequality in the smooth turf marks the spot where someone is waiting, waiting; where

" Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

Kate strays from tomb to tomb, willing to delay her going; marks the neglected rose and the choked wallflower, that tell of a love that has waned; reads the uncouth verses; the consoling words of promise; reads the dates when John Hughes, and

Robert Jones, and Hugh Owens said good-bye to earth with eyes that did not see them. Her patience is rewarded at last. A big man comes out of the low porch in a tall hat, and a faultless Sunday coat that sits like wax to his magnificent figure ; comes out quickly, and strides over the graves to her side,—a big man, who has been pushing and hurrying through the issuing crowd, with dark-browed impatience, towering like King Agamemnon among the Achæans, a full head and shoulders over most of them.

“ Here you are, darling ! ” he says hurriedly, when he gets up to her. “ I could not get out before, and I cannot stay a second now, for Augusta is hurrying out to spy after me as quick as she can ; ” and he cast a black look, half of dread, half of bitter anger, at the door behind him ; “ but I was bent on seeing you, Kate, to tell you you must meet me to-night at eight o’clock on the shore by the bridge across the rail-

way. . Now don't fail on any account ; remember, eight o'clock exactly."

She says "Yes," and puts out a small gray glove for him to shake. He just touches it, and then turns away quickly, and strides back leisurely, in time to receive Miss Augusta coming in haste out of the porch, with a scowl, which shows that young lady she has again been found out. And Kate strolls home, demure and decorous, perfectly satisfied with the manner in which morning service is conducted at Aber Fynach church.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUNDAY evening now ; evening service over, and all the church-goers trying to cool their hot cheeks, after the close, stuffy pews, in the breeze that comes so freshly from somewhere over the waves. Everybody is on the shore ; all the *élite* and all the non-*élite* ; those who on week-days are divided between drives in little hired carriages, mountain rambles, and railway excursions are all poured out on the beach. Maid-servants are conducting boisterous flirtations with loutish, slouching youths, in a sort of mongrel, quasi-nautical attire. Uncouth hobble-de-hoys and shrill "gamins" are parading about in noisy, loud-laughing parties, luring any unwary dog they may meet into the water with far-

thrown splashing stones. The sun was preparing for his daily death ; but dying with slow majesty, as a king should die. Even though he was "*in extremis*," his face kept so much of its own brightness that you could not look at it yet with steady, undazzled eyes ; all his fire-rays were round him still, going down to meet extinction with him in the baths of ocean. And from him a tremulous fluctuating path of rose and flame led over the waters, as if all seas and floods wanted still to commemorate the blessed feet that once walked Galilee's dark waves so many ebbing years ago. The sea still kept her sweet Sunday gravity ; all her innumerable smiles laid aside till to-morrow—not one curving her cheek. Lovingly she stretched out her arms to embrace the slow-descending sun (his strength so nigh spent now), and invited him to sleep, quiet and cool, all night on her breast. The moon climbed shy and silent meanwhile up the dusk summer sky,

over the shoulder of a low hill, at the head of the quiet valley, and blushed red and warm under the sun's regal eyes, though it was but an expiring gaze he could give to "that orbed maiden" now. The great level sand-plains stretched away, yellow and brown-streaked, so smooth and ridgeless that one could fancy that elves and fairies would be whirling round in airy circles on their shining surface, when everybody else was in bed and asleep. I have said that all Pen Dyllas was out on the beach, and so they were; that part of the beach which was just opposite the place itself, and for about a quarter of a mile on each side of it, in both directions. But further on there were stillness and untrodden flats—unpeopled as Sahara itself. The gulls had it all to themselves here, at least, to speak exactly, nearly all to themselves; for there were just two people besides, whom it seems hardly worth while mentioning. A big, dark gentleman, and

a small fair lady sauntering along, as if most decidedly not engaged in a walking-wager.

"Come away from here, Kate," Dare had said, when Kate had first joined him, obedient to his injunctions, exactly on the stroke of eight; and the dark face had a preoccupied, angered look upon it, as if its possessor had just been crossed in something he desired. "There's no possibility of having any peace or privacy in this abominable hole. There's not a spot where one can have the smallest chance of being left alone. These snobs," he said, raising his voice a little, so that the aforesaid snobs might hear, "seem as if they had never seen a lady or gentleman either before!"

This was not all Dare's conceit. There was some slight foundation in fact for his wrath, as he glared irefully at a couple of innocuous young haberdashers, who were turning their heads back to look, with

admiring interest, at two figures which were made after a cut not common in Pen Dyllas. So he had hurried her away from among the honest, fat burghers, and the comfortable Sunday-clothed tradespeople, beyond the last group of gossiping women and befurbelowed children; on and on, further still, round the base of a little rugged hill that in spring tides stands ankle deep in salt-water, out of sight of the sauntering families—out of sight of the little cottage by the railway—out of sight of Pen Dyllas itself; saying hardly anything, either of them, as they passed along; for Dare seemed to have got a silent fit upon him, and Kate, chameleon-like, took her colour from him. Her love was not exacting; with Elaine, she could have said,

“Nay, but near thee, dear lord, I am at rest.”

Nothing but sea-gulls now round the sheltering corner of this little hill—ubiquitous sea-gulls,—and Dare stops short, and heaves a deep sigh out of his great chest, and says,

"There! we're safe from inquisitive snobs now, I think, Kate. Let's sit down here and rest."

So they sat down on a heap of stones, and Dare took off his hat and threw it beside him, and pushed off the dark rings of hair, not allowed to be long enough to amount to curls, from off his wide deep-lined brow; and for a space they both sat silent, looking out over the broad blue desert before them, with gravity in their eyes. But their gravity was not of the same sort in its inward workings, though it was alike in its outward manifestations. Kate's rose out of her deep gladness; the weight of which was so heavy that it crushed out all desire for light laughter and little jokes and pretty playfulnesses.

One does not laugh when one is most blessed. She was holding communion and talk with this great bliss within her now, trying to take its measure and its weight, trying to feel how wide it spread, trying to

fathom the depth of the sea of passion that lay calm and untempest-shaken now in her breast, and failing utterly.

Dare's gravity was not so simple in its origin ; it was of a more compound character ; it had two parents. One was the strongest, wildest joy he had ever felt, or ever could feel, and the other the bitterest annoyance he had ever experienced in all his thirty years of evil doing. He had to-day been thwarted and bored and badgered ; roused, in fact, into one of his worst rages by a combined attack on the part of his relatives. "D—n them all," he was saying now, with gentlemanlike pious affection. Moreover, he was registering an inward vow—an oath, not loud, but deep as his being's self—that let him be worried and bullied and set upon by his father, by his mother, by his brother, by his sisters, by his uncles, by his aunts, by his cousins, and by anyone else who chose to try, together or severally, that no human power

should avail to take little Kate out of his fast-enclosing arms again. It would have been all very well to talk of giving her up a fortnight ago; but *now* all the men upon earth and all the devils in hell should not snatch her away out of his grasp.

He was better now, and turned round to Kate.

"I'm a dull fellow to take a walk with; arn't I, Kitty?" he asked; and his stern ill-tempered mouth relaxed into a smile that was quite gentle. "Here I have been sitting for the last half hour, never uttering to you a word. It was a great mistake your not taking Guy instead of me. Why, he'd have rattled away by the hour to you."

"You could never be a dull fellow to me," said Kate, very openly, with sweet flattery, which was yet bare truth. "I should not be a bit dull if you were to sit here all night till the sun comes up again over there;" and she pointed to the

east. She did not see why she should keep that irksome cloak over her love any longer now; there was no need for it.

"So you like to be with me, little Kate, do you?" asked Dare, who never could hear this formula repeated too often; and he picked up a stone and aimed it at an inoffensive gull that had come unwarily close; however, he did not hit it.

"Of course I do," replied Kate, with a ridiculous imitation of one of Dare's frowns; "and you know that as well as I do, only you like to hear me make a fool of myself."

Another gull came quite close with impunity now, for Dare's eyes had found their favourite resting-place.

"So you like me, do you?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Kate, quasi impatient. "How many times must I tell you so?"

"You're rather singular in your opinion, Kate," he went on; "most people do

not like me," he said, with haughty indifference as to what anybody thought of him; "they say I'm a sulky, ill-conditioned sort of beggar."

"I don't care how sulky you are," replied Kate stanchly. "I'm sure you can get into dreadful rages; nobody that had seen you frown could doubt that. But I don't mind that at all. I would not have you altered if I could."

"You've the bad taste to like me, sulks and all, eh, Kate?" said Dare, with a deep pleased laugh; and then it occurred to him that she was absurdly and disagreeably far off; and he stretched out an arm, and pulled her gently to him. "Are you contented now, you small person?" he asked, with tender possessiveness; "or are you very anxious to get away? not that I should let you, if you were."

"Perfectly contented," said Kate, with great candour, and then silence reigned yet a little while again. The sea creeps up a

few yards nearer, with stealthy ripples; the sun is almost gone; there is hardly anything remaining of him, but the bright memory he has left in the western sky. And the moon steals up higher and higher, looks down on the lovers, and dashes some of her white light on that full recumbent form, and under those green eyes. Then Kate withdrew herself from Dare's arms, and said suddenly to him, looking quite excited at some thought that had just visited her. "Dare, do you remember that day you met me in the road?"

"Of course I do," answered Dare. "What a wicked, tantalising little sinner you were that day, Kate!"

"Was I?" said Kate, smiling a satisfied little smile. "Well, you know just before I met you, I had been in the wood, O, for ever so long. O, Dare, you don't know how wonderfully miserable I was that day, such a fuss I made, all by myself, because I thought you did not care about me!" and

the thought of her past woes interrupted the thread of her narrative.

“Poor little soft kitten!” he said, “but what was the nice little anecdote you were going to tell me? do let’s have it.”

“Why,” said Kate; “when I was there, all by myself, I said such wicked things. I said that I wished to goodness I could make a bargain with God, that I might have you all to myself, for just one month, to be always with you; and then afterwards I said I should be quite content to be lost and miserable and ruined for all ages afterwards. And since yesterday, I have been thinking, Dare, that perhaps God has taken me at my word, and that I’m going to get my bargain. It seems like it, doesn’t it?” she asked, and the green eyes looked rather awed and sobered. “Well,” she said, shaking off that feeling, “even if it is so, I don’t repent of my bargain. I’d do it again.”

“Superstitious little goose!” said Dare

laying his dark hairy face caressingly against her pale smooth one. "You shall have me, since you think me such a prize, and heaven too, if there is such a place. But what have you got to do with heaven now? Plenty of time for that yet awhile. I could not spare you now," and his voice sank to one of the deepest of its rich bell tones.

"I'm glad of it," said Kate, not caring much whether what she said was very impious or not; "I'm sure I don't want to go there. You are not going there, I don't believe; and it would be very dreary without you."

Wicked Kate has been running down hill very fast this week; she would have shuddered to say that ten days ago. Let no one think I am defending this girl, or holding her sentiments up as the pattern of what a young woman's should be; nor let anyone, however incapable of separating the historian's own ideas from those of the

people whose history he is telling, imagine that I am describing Dare as being in any-wise a hero or fine fellow. I think him as great and unmitigated a scoundrel as any strictest censor of morals can do. For my part, I shall not pity him in the least when Nemesis overtakes him (if that grewsome lady ever does). To describe bad actions is not, as I would meekly submit to indignant virtue, to be an accomplice in them; otherwise he who relates a murder is equal in iniquity to him who commits it, and the police-reporters are deeper dyed in guilt than any other members of the community. But to return.

That word "dreary" recalled Dare to a sense of his own afflictions; of the worries lying couchant, ready to spring upon him so soon as he should reënter the hospitable portals of Llyn Castle. He brooded over them for a little bit, and then spoke, harsh-voiced and stern (for his spirit was in the gall of bitterness just then), harsh-

voiced even to the small woman whose utter surrender would have made him merciful.

"You talk a great deal about your love for me, Kate. You have none of the pretty little mock coynesses that most women affect. You speak out more openly than many would be willing to do. I wonder is it all talk, all froth, and surface-bubbles, or would it be of force enough to make a sacrifice, even a great one, that should be asked of it?" and doubt and distrust reigned over the rugged features as he spoke.

"Try me!" said Kate briefly, with a calmness that was born of a deep consciousness of inward strength to do anything and dare anything he bid her.

"Are you like other women, I wonder—feeble and puny-spirited—whom a breath will blow away, lightly won and lightly lost?" said Dare again, thinking suspiciously of the many frail ones whom he had seen as darts running into the hand that leaned

on them; "or are you made of sterner stuff, that would not stop at a trifle for the man you loved? Let me look at you, Kate." And he took her small white face between his two hands, and read it intently with soul-reaching steadfast gaze.

"I don't know what stuff I'm made of, I'm sure," said Kate, softly rubbing her cheek coaxingly against one of the hands that picture-wise framed it; "but I know I'd keep to you through thick and thin."

"So you say, Kate—so you say," replied Dare, distrustful still; "but you are a woman, and women are born to tell lies and drive men mad. Could you stand a great test, Kate—a test that other women would wince and shrink away from?"

"Try me," again repeated Kate; and in the soft voice there was strong determination, as she lay there restful in all the wealth of her dead-leaf hair washed in moonlight on his breast.

"Perhaps, if I did, you'd fail me; per-

haps, if I asked any sacrifice as a gift at your hands, you'd answer me, like other women, with puling objections of right and wrong, paltry cut-and-dried maxims about sin and folly," said Dare with fierce gloom.

"You are my right and wrong, Dare, now," returned the soft voice, resolute still.

A great light of joy rushed into Dare's eyes as he heard.

"Do you know what you are saying?" he said very eagerly. "Am I really your right and wrong? Do I stand in the place of Providence to you? If I were to tell you to do anything, however startling and terrifying it might be to you, would you do it simply, unquestioningly, *because* I told you?"

"*If—if*," answers Kate evasively, taking up a few grains of sand in her small hand and shaking them out to the wind again; "I hate *if*; it is an ugly word. Why should we speculate on impossible possibilities?"

"They are not impossible, Kate; they are eminently probable. Suppose, child, that I ask of you something that will make society sweep away its Pharisaical garments and turn up its sanctified eyes at you?"

"O, society!" said Kate, with a light-hearted little laugh; "society, in the sense you mean, and I have only a bowing acquaintance. Every cloud has a silver lining; and that is one advantage of being completely insignificant, that you are not in much terror of Mrs. Grundy."

"Why *will* you evade my question, child?" Dare said impatiently. "Let me put it so that there may be no mistake. If *here*, on this very spot, to-night, I ask you, with no other inducement but my love, to do something that will run counter to the whole course of your education, to every idea of right that has ever been instilled into you,—something indisputably wicked, according to the narrow bigots who lay down the law of what is wicked

and is good,—would you do it, or would you not?"

Kate's smooth brow contracts into a frown of pain, and there is deep pain in her voice.

"If you were to ask me to do anything very wicked you would not be *you*; at least you would not be the *you* you are to me."

"If you have been unwise enough to set me up on any *good-boy* pedestal," cries Dare fiercely, "for Heaven's sake pull me down again. God knows I have never lent you a finger to help myself up there. Kate" (emphasising every word), "once for all, never fancy that I shall not do anything because it is too wicked. If I have an end in view, get to it I must, even if the way lay through hell."

"But what opposition is there between love and goodness?" cries Kate passionately. "If it is wicked of us to love one another, why did God put it into our hearts?"

"*Why ! why !*" repeats Dare scornfully ; "if you stop to answer all the *whys* that meet you at every turn in this world you'll have to wait some time. But answer me, Kate, you *must* answer. Yes or no is the point that my life, and yours too, hangs upon."

"O, Dare, I don't want to answer," turning her head from side to side uneasily ; "I hate suppositions."

"Answer, Kate !" with displeased command in the deep voice.

"Why do you drive me to such horrible alternatives ?" she asked plaintively. "O God, I'm very wicked ! I'd do anything almost sooner than lose you ; and yet—"

"There must be no 'and yet's' between you and me. If you give yourself to me—into my hands—it must be for ever. There must be no taking back the present again, as a child takes back a toy it has given to another child. The gift must be absolute,

or in my eyes it is worthless. O, Kate, Kate, if I find I have tried you by too hard a test, harder than even you can stand,—find it out when it's too late, when I have lost you,—what should I do then, Kate? O God, what should I do?" and the hard deep-hued face looked quite white and drawn at the agony of the bare thought of that bereavement, that destitution.

"You'll never lose me unless you throw me away," returned Kate, with gentle tender firmness. "I should like to be asked to do some hard thing, that you might see how easily I'd do it. Nothing could be hard to me now—nothing, at least, that you'd ask."

"Put your arms round my neck, Kate," Dare bid her now, imperatively fond. "Let me feel them warm about me. Look up in my face and call me 'Dare,' as you did yesterday in the conservatory. Perhaps it is the last time you'll ever do it," he said, with bitter anticipation, fearing so much because

he loved so much. "Perhaps to-morrow you'll call me Colonel Stamer, and bow to me," he added, gnawed with sharp pain. "Perhaps, after I've told you what I have got to tell you, you will not even bow to me."

Kate was very obedient. She threw her round firm white arms about his neck. She feigned no shyness, no aversion to so doing; she was past the stage for such hypocrisy here to-night on this lone beach.

"Dare," she said, steady and distinct; "my own Dare! The Dare for whom I'd have my head cut off, and not mind the axe coming down on it, hardly a bit."

"Darling little witch!" he said at last, under his breath, but she heard him. "O, Kate, you must keep to me indeed," he went on, with the wrecked pathos of a storm-shaken rudderless soul. "What would become of me if you did not? What should I do if I was to lose my

little Kate, now when I've felt what it is to have her?"

"Hush, hush, hush! you're talking nonsense," said Kate, stroking his hairy countenance very soothingly. "Is not your little Kate close to you? Is not she disgracefully, shamefully willing to give up everything and everybody for you? What more can she say?"

Dare hardly seemed to hear her. He was looking out over the sea, that the moon had nearly clothed in her ghostly shimmering amice—looking out with luminous eyes that had the anguish of the fallen archangel written in their bold shadowy depths. The stakes were the highest he had ever played for. If he lost, he should be a bankrupt for life, and the odds were against him. Strong to do and to dare as that southern-souled girl was for him, he knew she would shrink back from the precipice he was going to lead her to. Well, shrink as she might, she must take

that dread leap with him to-night. He'd force her into the chasm if she would not go there of her own accord. There was no help for it now: she should not go back. So the fiends that ruled this man's soul with a continual wearing tyranny whispered to him, and he said:

"Yes," to them. "What should I do without the great green eyes that have looked away all my heart as never woman-eyes did before?" he went on; and the rich organ-tones fell shaken, and as it were jangled by the inward rack. "What devilries have you been practising on me, you little sorceress?" he inquired almost fiercely of her. "You're not beautiful, Kate; I doubt your being even pretty. My sisters laugh at the idea of your being good-looking. You've no fine, straight, regular features; your face has more faults than I can count; and yet you seem to me the loveliest woman that ever drove a man out of his senses."

"That's because you are blind," said Kate, smiling; "and I hope you'll continue so. You know it is to my advantage you should." And she tried to lure him back to cheerfulness by a little feeble attempt at a joke.

But Dare would not be so lured back. It would take a good deal to pull him out of the abyss he had got into. There was no joking with him to-night.

"Will you vow, Kate?" he asked, taking hold of both her hands, and bending down eagerly over her; "will you swear by everything you hold most sacred that nothing I can tell you, nothing that you can hear from anybody else about me, nothing that can by possibility happen, shall have power to make you give me up? Will you swear to do anything I bid you—*anything*, however wrong and abandoned it may seem in the eyes of the prudish world? Will you, Kate, will you?"

The devil's fire was in his eyes again—

the fire she had been wont to shrink under. She winced now under it.

"Oaths were made for people who break their promises," she said restlessly. "I don't break mine. What makes you think I should?"

"It may be a caprice of mine—a fancy—what you will; but one likes to humour even the caprices of those one loves. I want to hear you yourself bind yourself to me; it will seem to me then a knot that neither man nor God can untie."

"It's that already, I think," she said firmly; "but since you will have it, I swear by everything I hold most sacred that nothing that can happen shall make me turn away voluntarily, of my own accord, from Dare Stamer. There!" she said, "see my perfect trust in you. I put my soul in your hand."

Dare was intensely relieved.

"Brave little child!" he said admiringly. "You are made of the right stuff,

Kate—staunch to the backbone. And now let me tell you what has been weighing on my mind all this time; let me tell you the sacrifice I am going to ask of you. I tell you beforehand it is a great one—the greatest you could make. I wish I had done the job, I'm sure. I wish to God it was over!" and he looked as if the pill was a very bitter one to swallow. "But come nearer to me, Kate, while I talk to you. Let me hold you fast, and feel that you're not slipping out of my arms, little witch as you are!"

Kate laid down her head on his shoulder, as if its natural home was there, and a very dear home too.

"There," said she with a sigh, "that'll do, I suppose. Now go on."

END OF VOL. I.



